A Matter-of-Fact Magic Collection by

RUTH CHEW

Three Shrinking Tales

Featuring

Do-It-Yourself Magic

Earthstar Magic

Mostly Magic

Also by Ruth Chew

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THE MAGIC CAVE
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THREE WITCH TALES
(AN EBOOK OMNIBUS):
THE WITCH'S BUTTONS
WITCH'S CAT
THE WITCH'S GARDEN

RUTH CHEW

THREE SHRINKING TALES

Illustrated by the Author

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About the Author

RUTH CHEW

Do-It-Yourself Magic

Illustrated by the Author

“Wow! Rachel, look at that!” Scott Walker grabbed his sister’s arm and dragged her over to the shop window of the big discount store on Church Avenue.

Rachel looked at a red and green model car in the window. “That looks like those funny-looking cars we saw racing each other at the fair in the country last summer.”

“It’s a stock car racer,” Scott said.

Rachel looked hard at the car. “There’s no price.” She saw a flat box with a picture of the car on it. “No wonder. It’s just for display. You have to put it together yourself. Remember the trouble you had trying to build that sports car? In the end, Daddy had to do it. Even then it was lopsided.”

“You could help me.” Scott walked over to the door of the discount store. “Come on, Rachel. Let’s see how much the model costs.”

Rachel liked looking at the things in this store. It was bigger than the others on Church Avenue. Everything from school supplies to blue jeans was for sale here.

Scott walked down the aisle of toys. Rachel followed him, looking at everything on the shelves.

“Here it is, Rachel!” Scott picked up a box with a picture of the red and green car on it. “See, I was right. It says *racing stock car* on the lid. And look what else it says: *Easy to assemble!* There’s a man to drive it. He’s just the right size.”

Rachel looked at the price tag. “That costs almost seven dollars, Scott.”

Scott put down the box. The two children went over to a bin with a big sign over it:

MARKED DOWN

The things here were all either dented or dirty or missing a part. Rachel saw a big, blue box with pictures of something that could be clouds on it. In pale blue letters that seemed to drift in and out of the clouds, Rachel could just make out the words *The Build-Anything Kit*.

The box had a bashed-in corner, but there was no hole in it. Rachel picked it up.

"It's heavy." Rachel shook the box. "And it rattles. There must be a lot of parts."

"Let me see that." Scott leaned over to read the words in the clouds. "We could use this to build our own stock car racer. Look at the price, Rachel!"

"Seventy-nine cents, and don't forget the tax." Rachel took two quarters out of her pocket. "I still have this left from my last week's allowance."

Scott pulled out a quarter and two dimes. "I've got almost as much as you do. Together we have more than enough to buy the kit."

Rachel carried the blue box to the checkout counter.

The man at the counter looked at the box and then at the two children. "You understand that you can't return things that are marked down?"

"Why was this marked down?" Rachel asked.

"It was one of our high-priced sets, but it's been on the shelf for months," the man said. "I guess people thought it cost too much. We marked it down this morning because the box was damaged from so many children shaking it."

"Do you think the things inside are broken?" Scott wanted to know.

"That's a chance you'll have to take," the store man said. "I'm not allowed to open the box, but I understand there was nothing

breakable in the kit."

Rachel never knew why she suddenly wanted the kit so much. "We'll take it," she said, and put her two quarters on the counter.

Scott laid his money down beside hers.

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The store man rang up the sale on his cash register and put a nickel and four pennies change on the counter.

Scott took the pennies and gave the nickel to his sister. “That makes us just about even,” he said.

The store man laughed. He put the Build-Anything Kit into a plastic shopping bag with two handles. “You can take turns carrying it or you can each grab a handle. I hope it does everything you want it to.”

“Thank you.” Rachel took the plastic bag and carried it out of the store. It was lucky that her schoolbooks were in a backpack so she could use both hands. The kit seemed to get heavier with every step she took.

At the first cross street, Rachel said, “Maybe we should each take a handle.”

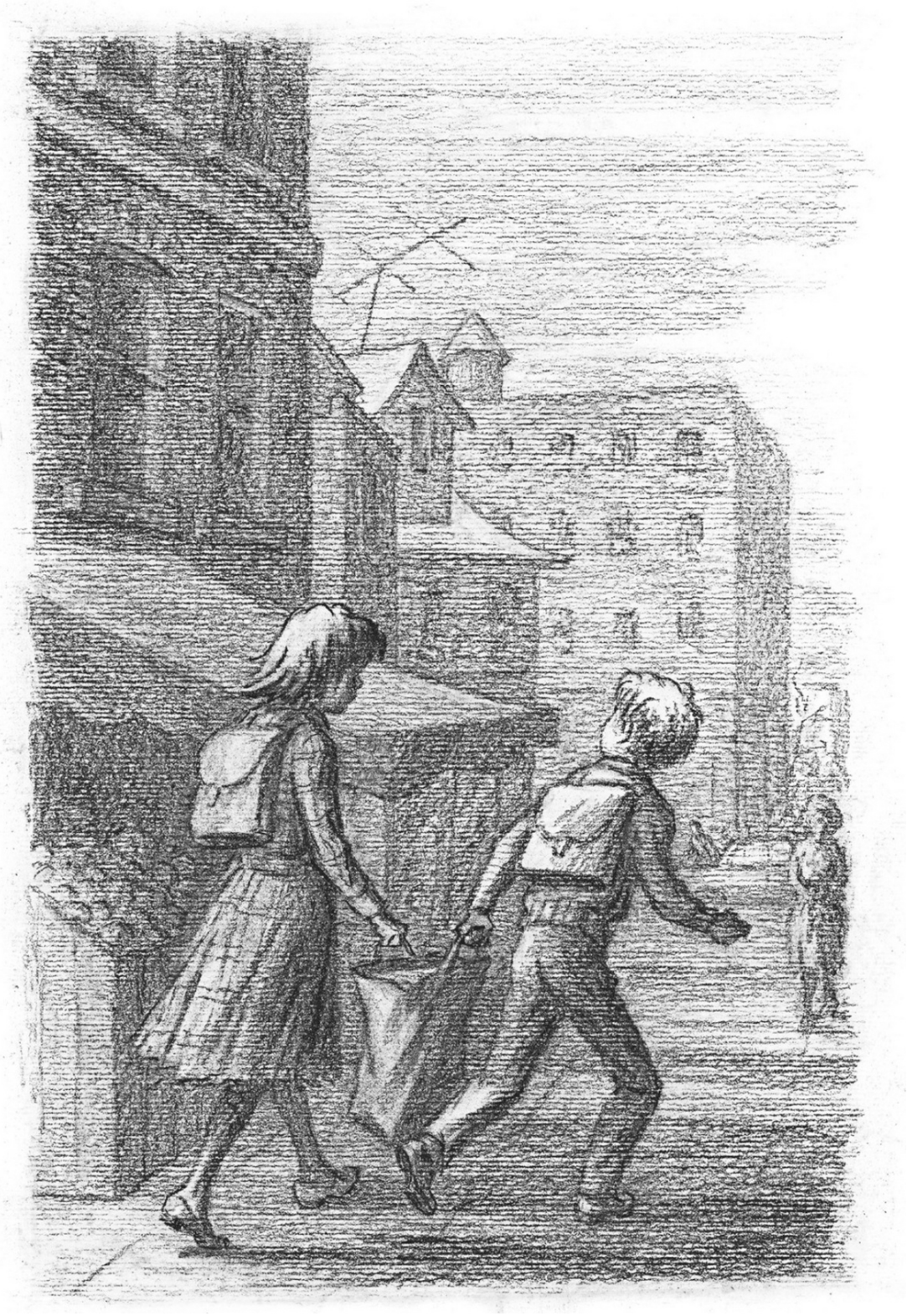
Scott carried his books on his back, too. “Hand me that bag, Rachel. I’ll take it the rest of the way home.”

Rachel was older than Scott. She didn’t think he was stronger than she was, but she wasn’t going to argue now. She gave him the plastic bag, making sure he had a good grip on it.

Scott lifted the bag and held it from the bottom.

The two children made their way along the crowded sidewalk. They passed a hardware store, a little dress shop, a dancing school, and a flower store with enormous stuffed toys in the window.

When they came to the fruit stand, Scott put the plastic bag down on the pavement. Rachel grabbed one of the handles. “We’ve tried taking turns,” she said. “Now let’s carry it together.”



Scott took hold of the other handle. Both children were surprised at how easy it was to carry the plastic bag now. They turned the

corner onto the street where they lived.

Their house was halfway down the block. They could see their mother waiting on the front stoop. She was looking up and down the street.

Mrs. Walker didn't wait for Scott and Rachel to reach the house. She ran down the street to meet them. "It's half past three on Friday!" she said. "Don't tell me *both* of you were kept after school for talking in class!" She bent over to give them each a kiss.

"We went into the discount store, Mom," Scott told her. "Wait till we show you the bargain we got!"

"I'll *have* to wait to see it," Mrs. Walker said. "Your dad telephoned and asked me to meet him after work. He wants to take me out for supper. Would you mind having TV dinners tonight?"

"Fried chicken?" Scott asked.

"Yes." Mrs. Walker smiled. "I know that's your favorite."

The three of them walked down the street to the old limestone house and climbed the front stoop. Mrs. Walker unlocked the door, and they went in.

"You'd better hurry and get your after-school snack," Mrs. Walker said, "or you won't be hungry at dinnertime." She started up the stairs. "I'll have to rush and change my clothes to go out."

Scott and Rachel left their backpacks and the plastic bag in the front hall and headed for the kitchen.

When their mother came back downstairs, Scott and Rachel were busy smearing butter and blackberry jam on English muffins.

"You'll need something to wash those down." Mrs. Walker took a container of milk out of the refrigerator and filled two glasses. Then she spun around as if she were dancing. "How do you like my new dress?"

"Nice," Rachel said.

Scott looked at the dress. "I saw one just like it last week in a shop window on Church Avenue. I wanted to buy it for your birthday, Mom."

His mother laughed. "Draw me a picture instead." She looked at the kitchen clock. "I'd better leave now," she said. "I don't want to keep your Dad waiting. Be sure to change out of your school clothes. Meantime, try not to get any jam on them. Oh, I almost forgot to tell you I'm expecting a package. Rachel, would you please sign for it?" Mrs. Walker went to get her coat and hat.

“Have a good time, Mother,” Rachel called.

Rachel and Scott heard the front door bang as their mother went out. They finished their after-school snack and put the dirty dishes into the dishwasher. Then they went to get their books from the front hall.

Rachel always liked to do her homework right away on Friday afternoon so she’d have the rest of the weekend free. She carried her backpack upstairs to her room.

Scott put his backpack on so he could carry the plastic bag with the Build-Anything Kit up to his room at the back of the house.

Rachel changed into a T-shirt, jeans, and sneakers. She sat down at her desk to do her homework.

Rachel read her social studies book and answered some questions. She was just going to start her math when Scott came into the room. “Look what I built.”

“Is that a garbage truck or a tricycle?” Rachel asked.

“It’s a stock car racer,” Scott told her. “There aren’t any directions, and I couldn’t find four wheels the same size.”

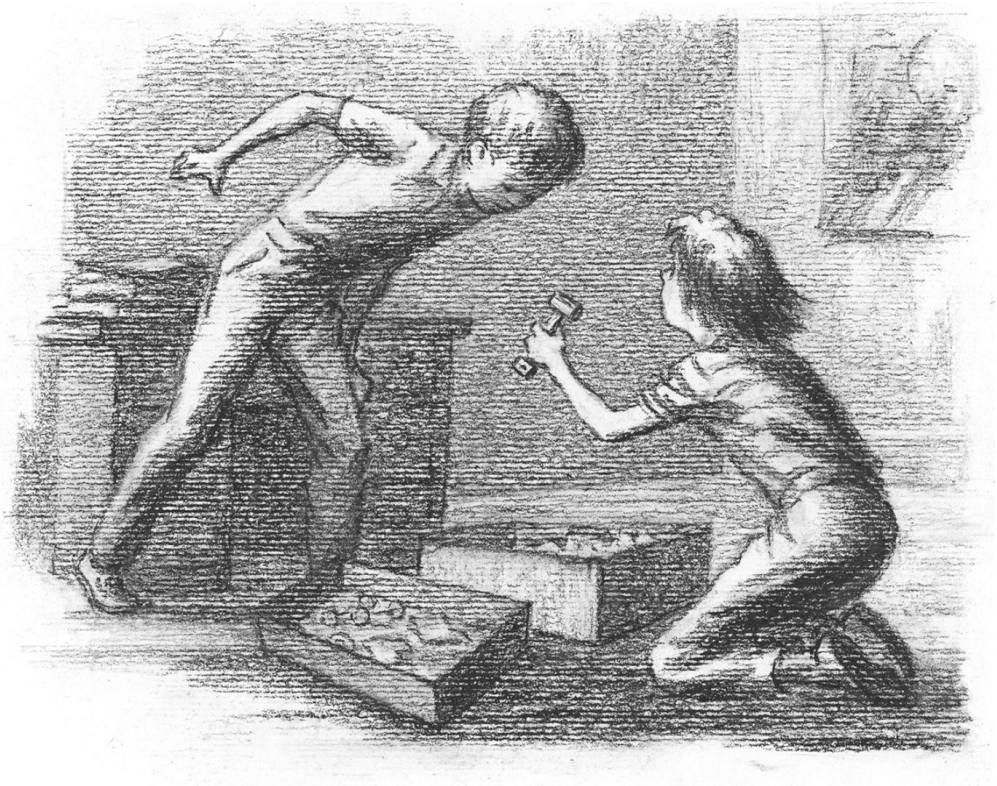
“I guess that’s why the kit was marked down,” Rachel said. “We should never have bought it.”

“You were the one who told the man we’d take it,” Scott reminded her.

Rachel knew he was right. “I’d better look at the kit, Scott. Bring along your racer, and we’ll see if we can make it better.” She got up from her desk and went down the hall to her brother’s room.

Scott had left the big blue box open on the floor. Rachel got down on her hands and knees to look at the different things in the box. There were a great many, and they were all jumbled together.

“The first thing we have to do is sort this stuff.” Rachel began to take out the things one at a time. She laid them side by side in the lid of the box. She picked up what looked like a little steering wheel. Rachel bent over to get a good look at it and found she had picked up something else as well. “Scott, take a look at this.”



“I never saw anything like that in the box.” Scott stared at the clear plastic tool. It looked like a hammer with two heads. One hammerhead was much smaller than the other.

“I didn’t see it, either, till I picked it up.” Rachel put the double hammer in the lid of the Build-Anything Kit. Then she reached into the blue box for an axle.

“Rachel,” Scott whispered. “Look!” He pointed to the lid.

The little plastic hammer had disappeared!

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"The hammer's gone!" Scott said.

"I put it right on top of all that junk," Rachel told him. "Maybe it slid down inside. Clear plastic is hard to see. You never even noticed the hammer when you were making your whatever-it-is." She reached into the lid and picked up the first thing she touched.

Scott grabbed her wrist. "Now it's back again!"

Rachel saw that she had the double hammer in her hand. She thought for a minute. "I guess it's hard to see when it's mixed with all those things. They're all different colors. What do you have that's plain and flat?"

Scott went over to his desk. "Here's the math test the teacher returned today. I only used one side of the paper."

Rachel took the hammer over to the desk. Scott put the math paper blank-side-up on top of his math book. Rachel laid the hammer on the paper. At once the hammer vanished.

Scott sat on his heels to look at the paper sideways. "There's no sign of it." He reached over to the place on the paper where he thought the hammer would be. "I can feel it, and I can see it now, too!"

Rachel felt a little thrill of excitement as she watched the hammer come into view the second Scott touched it. As soon as he lifted his finger, the little plastic tool could not be seen.

Scott took a deep breath before he picked up the hammer. Rachel knew that he was trying not to show he was scared.

He stood up and turned the hammer over and over in his hands. As long as he was holding it, both children could see it. "There's

some writing on the handle," Scott said. *"Sizer."* He thought for a minute. "Maybe that's the name of the maker."

"Well, it's part of the Build-Anything Kit," Rachel said. "Why don't we try to figure out what it's good for—besides getting lost? What did you do with that car you built?"

Scott had left his car on the floor beside the Build-Anything Kit. He took the hammer over and began to tap the wheels. When he hit a wheel with the big hammer, the wheel became smaller. Scott tried tapping with the little hammer. At once the wheel became bigger.

"Look at that!" Scott said.

"Now we know what the word *Sizer* means," Rachel said. "This hammer changes the size of things."

Scott sat down on the floor and set to work to match up the wheels of his racer.

Rachel got down on her hands and knees and leaned over the big blue box. She pulled out all the things that might be part of a car and placed them on the floor.

Scott fished around in the pile she made. “Here’s a windshield!”

The windshield was too small for the car Scott was building. He tapped it with the little hammer. Then it was too big. He had to work very slowly with both hammerheads until it was just the right size. “I’m beginning to get the hang of this thing,” he told Rachel. “It works much too fast if you’re not careful.”

Rachel didn’t know as much about cars as Scott did, but she wanted the racer to look like the ones at the country fair. She went to get her crayons, some paper, and a pair of scissors.

Rachel drew wiggly green stripes and circles on the paper. She cut them out. “Let me have the sizer for a minute, Scott. I want to see if it will work on something that isn’t part of the kit.”

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"I've almost finished putting the car together," Scott said. "You can have the sizer in a minute."

Rachel looked at the little red car. "It's much better than it was, Scott, but it still doesn't look like a stock car racer."

Scott scratched his head. Then he grinned. "It's the tires. Those racers all had tires much bigger than regular cars do." Scott tapped away with the small hammer until the tires were just the size he wanted. "How's that?"

"Better," Rachel said.

Scott handed Rachel the sizer. She gently tapped the wiggly green stripe she had made.

"It's getting bigger," Scott said. "I thought maybe the Build-Anything Kit was like a computer and was programmed by the sizer. But if the sizer works on things that aren't in the kit, it *can't* be a computer."

"No," Rachel agreed. Then she said in a whisper, "But all along I've had the feeling it was *magic*."

Neither of the children said anything for a little while.

Rachel started to check the size of the green stripe against the racing car.

"It's a little too big now," Scott said.

Rachel made the stripe smaller. "Do you have any glue, Scott?"

Scott went to get a jar of rubber cement from his desk top.

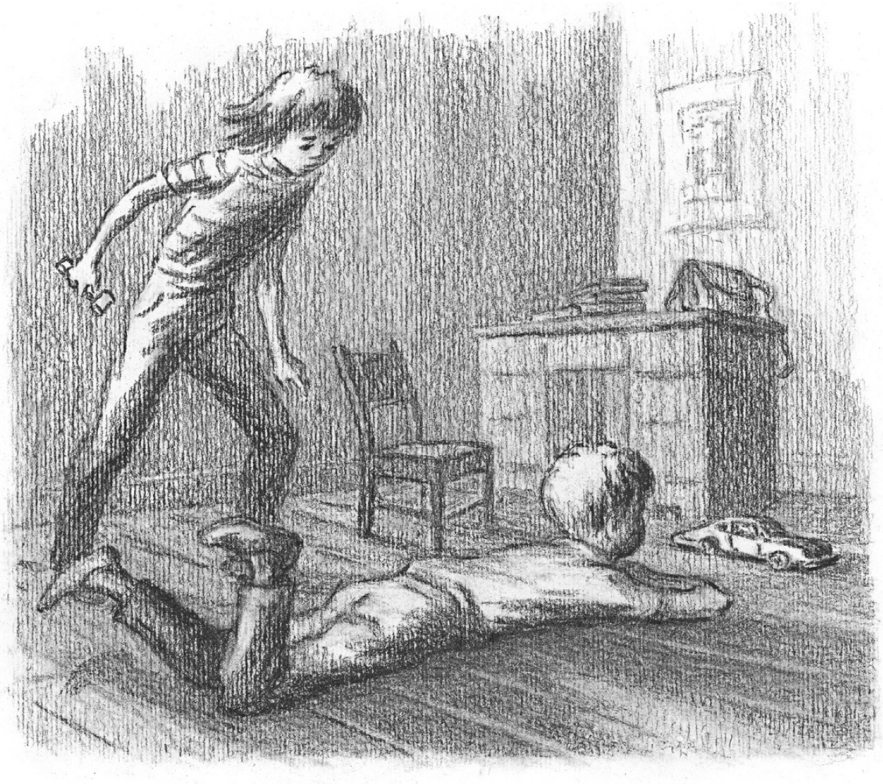
Rachel glued on the wiggly racing stripe. Scott helped her decide where to put the circles.

“It looks even better than the seven-dollar model in the discount store,” Rachel said. “It looks just like the stock car racers we saw at the fair.”

Scott lay down on his stomach to admire his work. “This is the best thing I ever built. There’s only one thing the car in the store had that this one doesn’t.”

“What’s that?” Rachel wanted to know.

“A driver,” Scott said.



Rachel was still holding the sizer. She didn’t know what made her tap Scott with it, but before she knew what was happening, he was only three inches high.

Rachel was so surprised that she couldn’t speak. She just stared at her brother.

Scott looked around and caught sight of his sister’s sneakers. He craned his neck to look up at her face. “How did you get that big?” His voice was so tiny that Rachel could hardly hear him.

“I’m not big, Scott,” she said. “You’re small.”

Scott put his hands over his ears. “Well, try not to shout.” He took a good look at the car he had built. “This is great! I’m just the right size for it now!”

Rachel was sure she could never have done this if she had tried.

Scott opened the car door and climbed in. “Rachel, there’s a key in the dashboard!”

A second later Rachel heard the purr of a little motor. Scott drove his car across the floor. He steered it around the desk and drove under the chair. Then he went in and out of the open closet and all around the bed.

Rachel pushed the magic sizer deep into the pocket of her jeans for safekeeping. If she put it down, she wouldn’t be able to see it. Then how could she get Scott back to his usual size? It was a scary thought.

Scott zoomed past her ankle in the little car. He leaned out of the window to shout, “Thank you, Rachel. This is fun!”

The front doorbell rang twice, loud and long. Whoever was there must be in a hurry.

Rachel ran downstairs.

Rachel peeked through the venetian blind on the front door.

The Parcel Service man was standing on the stoop outside. He had a package in his hand.

Rachel opened the door. “My mother told me she was expecting something,” she said. “She asked me to sign for it.”

Just then Rachel heard a bumping noise. It seemed to be coming from the stairs in the hall right behind her.

“Sign here.” The Parcel Service man held out his clipboard and handed Rachel a pen.

She wrote her name on the line marked with an X. Then the man gave her the package. He turned to go back to his truck.

Before Rachel could close the door, something shot past her onto the stoop outside.

It was the little stock car racer!

Bump! Bump! Bump! The racer went rolling down the front steps of the house.

The Parcel Service man jumped out of the way. “That thing nearly knocked me over. You’d better take it back inside.”

Rachel dropped the package on the chair by the door. She took the magic sizer out of her pocket and rushed out onto the front stoop.

She looked for the little car on the sidewalk in front of the house, but it wasn’t there.

Then she saw it. The stock car racer had rolled into the street. It was right in front of the Parcel Service truck. And the truck was starting to move!

Rachel was frantic. She didn't have time to think. She was never sure if she ran down the steps or the magic sizer pulled her down. Rachel had never moved so fast in her life.

The sizer seemed to be flying ahead of her. Rachel held on to it and dived toward the little racing car.

Crash!

The magic sizer smashed down onto the racer. Rachel didn't know which hammerhead hit the car.

Screech!

The Parcel Service truck skidded to a stop to keep from slamming into a big red and green car.

For a minute the Parcel Service man just stared. Then he drove away slowly down the street.

Rachel stared at the car, too, and then at the sizer in her hand. She must have hit the stock car racer with the small hammer. The car was much bigger now.

Rachel looked inside the car.

Scott was sitting behind the steering wheel. He turned his head and saw her. "Rachel, now *you're* small! Did you hit yourself on the head?"

"Don't be silly, Scott," Rachel said. "Look around. I'm not any smaller than usual. You're back to your regular size. Don't you know

you were almost run over by the Parcel Service truck? How could you be stupid enough to drive that toy car into the street?"

"I didn't do it on purpose," Scott told her.

"Why did you do it?" Rachel asked.

"I heard the most terrible rasping noise, and then you rushed out of my room," Scott said.

Rachel thought for a second. "That was the doorbell. The Parcel Service man was leaning on it."

"How was I to know? I thought it was some kind of siren, and I tried to follow you. Next thing I knew the car was rolling down the stairs. I was afraid it would turn over if I tried to stop." Scott grinned. "That car did tricks just like the stock car racers at the fair. It went down the stairs and rolled out the front door and down the stoop. And it stayed right side up the whole time!"

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Rachel wanted to see what the racer was like inside. She looked through the window.

Scott opened the door. “Get in, Rachel.”

She climbed into the car and shut the door.

“I didn’t know you knew how to drive,” Rachel said.

“This car drives like the ‘Dodge ’em’ cars at Coney Island. I’ll show you.”

Scott stepped on the button on the floor. The big stock car jumped forward and roared down the block to the corner. Scott took his foot

off the button. He steered the car around the corner onto Albemarle Road. It coasted to a stop halfway down the block.

"Isn't this fun?" Scott said.

"Doesn't this car have brakes?" Rachel asked him.

Scott looked at the floor of the car. "I forgot to put them in when I was building it. But then I never put in the key that turns the motor on, or the button that makes the car go."

Rachel looked at the double hammer she had in her hand. "Scott, the sizer seems to do what it wants to, not only what we want it to."

Scott grinned. "I was wondering how you got me back to my right size so fast. Suppose you made me twice as big?"

"It's not funny, Scott," Rachel said. "Maybe we shouldn't use the sizer on ourselves."

A woman came out of the house in the middle of the block. She tapped on the car window. Rachel rolled the window down.

The woman looked hard at Scott and Rachel. "I know you children live in the neighborhood, but I've never seen this crazy-looking car around here before. Where is the driver?"

Scott was sitting behind the steering wheel. All of a sudden both children remembered that neither of them was old enough to drive a car.

Scott didn't know what to say.

The woman frowned. "You'd better go and get your father to move that car. It's blocking my driveway." She walked back to the sidewalk and stood there, watching.

Rachel opened the car door. "I'll make sure that the car is moved," she said to the woman. "It might take a few minutes. You could get your car started in the meantime." Rachel began to walk down the sidewalk.

The woman went into her house.

Scott stepped on the button. The stock car racer started down the street. Rachel ran to keep up with it.

Scott took his foot off the button. The car went slower and slower. It stopped just before it came to the corner.

Rachel stood on the sidewalk. “What luck! Here’s a parking space! Just back into it, Scott.”

“I can’t,” Scott told her. “The car only goes forward.”

Rachel remembered how hard it was to control the “Dodge ’em” cars in Coney Island. The next street was Ocean Parkway. It was always crowded with traffic. She didn’t dare let her brother drive around the corner.

Rachel turned around to see if there was anyone else on the street. “Scott, look!”

The woman who had been talking to them was not taking her car out after all. Instead she was standing in the street, talking to two policemen in a patrol car. And she was pointing to the stock car racer with Scott behind the steering wheel!

“Scott,” Rachel said, “get out of the car and stand clear of it. Hurry!”

Scott did as he was told.

Rachel was still holding the magic sizer.

Wham! She hit the stock car racer as hard as she could with the big hammer.

“Oops! I must have hit it too hard.” Rachel bent down and picked up a tiny car. It was no bigger than a Matchbox toy. She handed it to her brother. “We can try to make it the right size later.”

“It’s okay the way it is,” Scott said. “We’d better go home. I left the front door open.” Rachel raced back the way they had come.

Scott ran after her.

They had to pass the woman who was talking to the two policemen. She rushed over and grabbed Rachel by the arm. “Wait a minute!”

Rachel stopped running.

Scott ran to stand beside her.

The policemen were still sitting in their car. The woman called to them. “These are the children I telephoned the precinct about.”

One of the policemen got out of the patrol car. He walked over to the children. “What’s this I hear about you driving a big red car with green stripes?”

“You mean this?” Scott held out the tiny stock car racer.

The policeman took it from him. “Hey, Frankie, take a look! It’s a perfect little stock car. Boy, wouldn’t my kid love this! Where did you get it, sonny?”

“We made it from a kit we bought at the discount store on Church Avenue,” Scott told him.

The woman interrupted. “I’m not talking about that toy. This boy was driving a big, dangerous car. He must have left it around the corner on Ocean Parkway.”

“Frankie, take a run around the block and see if you can spot the car. I’ll stay here with the kids.” He turned to the woman. “Did the car you’re talking about look anything like this?” He showed her the little racer.

The woman stared. “Exactly!”

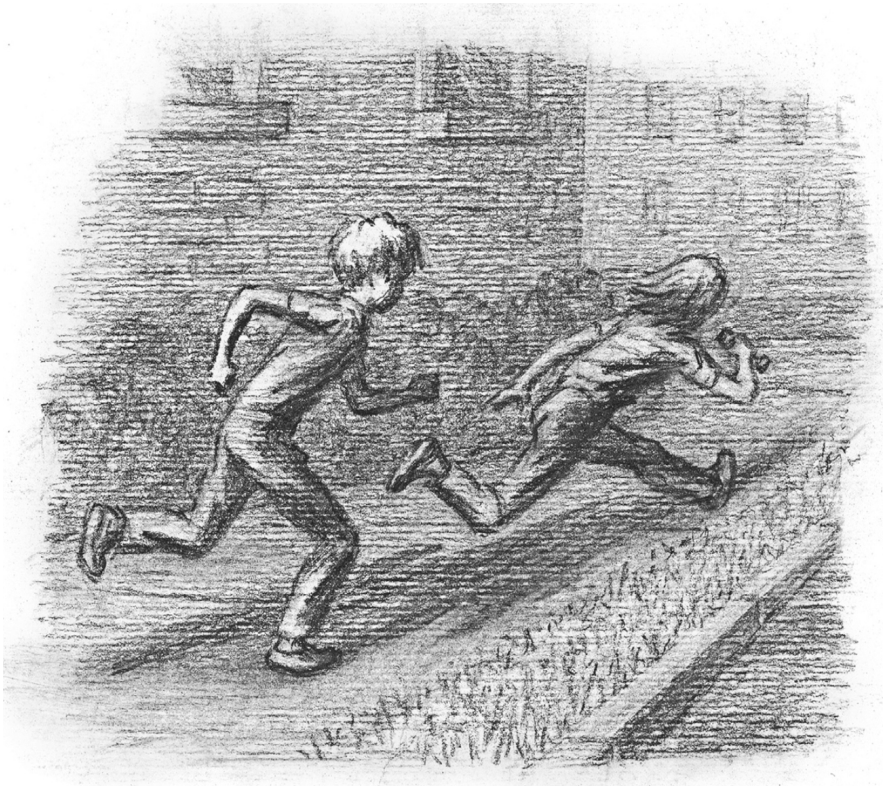
“That car should be easy to spot.” The policeman at the wheel drove the patrol car around the block. In almost no time he was back.

“Sorry, lady. No sign of it,” he said to the woman. “Get in the car, Bill! I just had a call about a drug pusher on East Third Street.”

Bill handed Scott the little stock car racer and jumped into the patrol car. It streaked away with the siren blaring.

Scott put the toy car into his pocket. The woman turned around and went back into her house.

Scott and Rachel remembered their front door. They started running again.



When Rachel and Scott reached their house, the door was wide open. A man in a leather jacket was standing on the walk looking up at it. He started up the steps.

The two children dashed past the man on the front steps and ran into the house. Rachel slammed the door tight behind them.

"That man looked as if he was going to walk right in here," Scott said.

"Sh-sh!" Rachel put her finger to her lips. "I thought I heard a noise. Maybe somebody is already in the house!"

She looked through the venetian blind on the front door. The man in the leather jacket was standing near the sycamore tree in front of the house. He seemed to be waiting for someone.

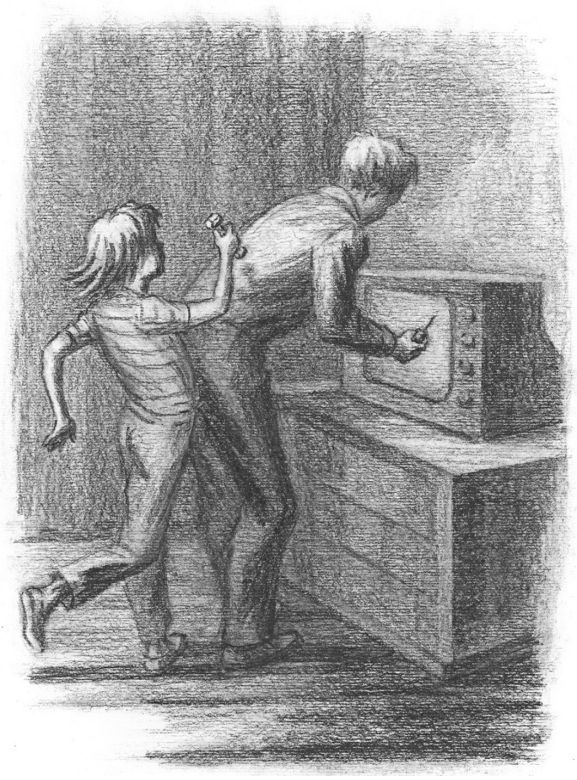
Rachel's heart began to pound. She tiptoed up the stairs in the hall. Scott came after her.

The door of the big bedroom at the front of the house was open.

Rachel and Scott saw a man with red hair standing in front of the color television set on their father's dresser. The man was dressed in blue jeans and a blue denim jacket, and he had a screwdriver in his hand. He leaned over the set.

Rachel was so angry she forgot to be scared. "Get away from Daddy's television set!" She was still holding the magic sizer in her hand. Before the man could turn around to see who was screaming at him, Rachel pounded him on the back with the large hammer. He tried to push her away, but he was already much too small.

Scott ran to the bathroom to get his toothbrush glass. When he came back, the man had shrunk to the size of a cockroach.



“Rachel, stop!” Scott cried.

Rachel put the magic sizer into the pocket of her jeans. Scott picked up the tiny man and put him into the glass.

For a while, the man just stood and looked around. Then he tried to climb up the sides of the glass, but they were too slippery. He beat on the glass with his fists and tried to kick a hole in it. It was no use.

The man was trapped. He was so small and looked so helpless that Scott began to feel sorry for him. He picked up the glass and held it in front of his face. “Don’t be afraid. We won’t hurt you.”

The man looked through the glass at Scott. His face was so tiny that Scott could barely see his mouth, but it seemed to be moving.

“He’s talking,” Scott said, “but I can’t make out what he’s trying to say. Let’s take him downstairs to the kitchen, Rachel. The light is brighter there.”

On their way to the kitchen Scott and Rachel had to pass the front door. Rachel peeked through the venetian blind. The man in the leather jacket had gone.

Scott carried the toothbrush glass with the little man in it to the kitchen. He set the glass on the table and sat on a chair facing it.

Rachel came into the room.

"I still can't make out what he's trying to say," Scott told her.

Rachel tore a corner off the memo pad on the shelf above the sink. She used the Eversharp pencil beside the memo pad to say in very small letters on the bit of paper

PLEASE WRITE

Rachel held the piece of paper in front of the toothbrush glass so the man could see it. He had to turn his head from one side to the other to read what she had written. Then he leaned back to look up through the open end of the glass at Rachel.

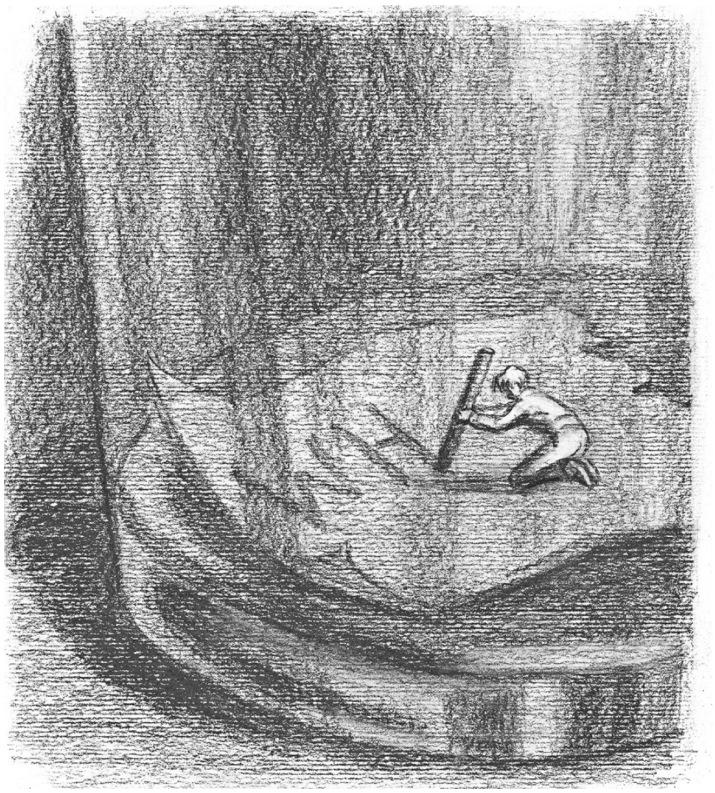
She pointed to her writing.

The man nodded.

Rachel tore another corner from the memo pad and dropped it into the toothbrush glass. The paper fell on top of the little man. He grabbed it and stepped on it to hold it down.

Rachel went to get a piece of thread from her mother's sewing cabinet. She broke off a bit of lead from the Eversharp pencil and tied it to the thread. Slowly she let the lead down into the glass until the man could take hold of it. It was like a thick stick in his hands.

The man got down on his hands and knees and began to write. The paper was bigger than he was. He made each letter as large as he could. It took a long time.



Scott watched him. “Why don’t you heat the TV dinners, Rachel? I’m hungry. I’ll tell you when he’s finished writing. Meantime I’ll write to him.” Scott picked up the Eversharp pencil.

Rachel took the TV dinners out of the freezer and read the directions. When the dinners were in the oven, she set the kitchen timer for thirty minutes and went to see how the letter writing was coming along.

“My hand is cramped from writing so small,” Scott said.

The man in the toothbrush glass was making a question mark as long as his arm. He stood up and tapped on the side of the glass. Rachel bent over to see what he had written. His letter said

WHAT HAPPENED?

Rachel wrote her answer on the back of the little piece of paper she had used before.

MAGIC

She held the paper near the glass so the man could read it. “Scott, where’s your letter?”

Scott's message was on a smudged scrap of paper. He had written

WHO ARE YOU?

The man read this. Then he turned over the paper in the glass and wrote

CHESTER

This took a long time.

"His name is Chester," Scott told Rachel. "I guess he didn't have room on his paper to write his last name. Maybe it's a long one, like O'Hoolihan. He looks kind of like a kid in my class with that name."

Ding! That was the timer.

"We'll have to try to find out more about him later. He can't make any trouble now that he's so small." Rachel went to take the TV dinners out of the oven. She put them on the table.

Chester was sitting cross-legged in the glass. Rachel didn't know if he was hungry, but it would take so long for him to tell her that the food would get cold.

She rinsed the cap from a soda bottle. Then she used her mother's kitchen scissors to cut a little cube of chicken from her dinner. Beside it she put a kernel of corn and a very small dab of mashed potato. She wiped the scissors clean and cut another cube. This one was from her brownie. There was room for it in the bottle cap, too.

Rachel put the bottle cap on the table. She cut the corner from her paper napkin and folded it neatly. "Take Chester out of that toothbrush glass, Scott," she said. "He'll eat at the table with us."

11

Chester seemed to enjoy his dinner. He was still eating when both Scott and Rachel had finished. At last he stopped and put both hands on his stomach to show that he was full. There was still some chicken and potato left in the bottle cap, but Rachel saw that the piece of brownie was all gone.

Rachel dumped the foil trays from the TV dinners into the kitchen garbage can. “You can clean up the rest of this mess,” she told her brother.

Rachel went upstairs. She wanted to see what else was in the Build-Anything Kit.

Scott put the dirty glasses and silverware into the dishwasher. He stuck his toothbrush glass in as well. Chester sat on the edge of the

kitchen table and swung his legs while he watched everything that was going on.

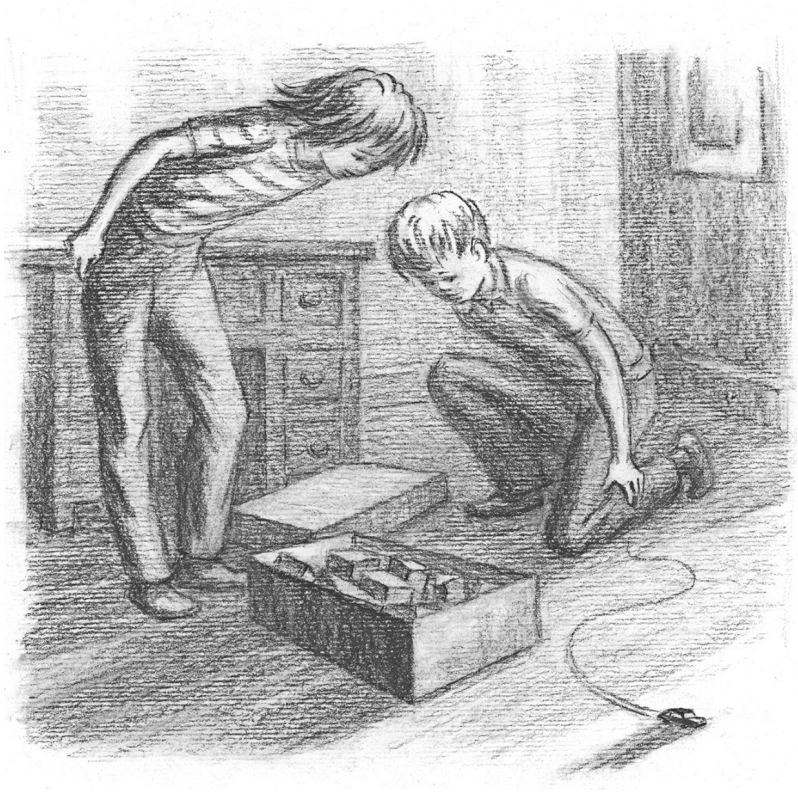
Scott thought it would be fun to play with him. He took the stock car racer out of his pocket and put it on the table. Chester stopped swinging his legs. He stood up and walked over to the car. It was just the right size for him. Chester opened the car door and slid behind the wheel.

“This is no place for you to drive.” Scott picked up the car and took it upstairs. The light was on in his room. Scott stepped inside and closed the door behind him.

Rachel was leaning over the Build-Anything Kit.

Scott held out the stock car racer so that Rachel could see Chester at the wheel. Then he put the car on the floor.

Seconds later Chester started the motor. The car leaped forward and rolled under the bed.



“I hope Chester has fun with it,” Scott said. “I’ve had enough of driving that car.”

The Build-Anything Kit was still on the floor of Scott's room. Rachel looked into the big blue box. "That's funny. You used a lot of parts to make the stock car racer, but the box is still full." She held up a rough gray block. "This looks like a stone. It feels like one, too."

Scott came over to see what she was talking about. "I don't remember anything like that in the kit."

"There are lots of them." Rachel began to build a wall of gray stones.

"Wait a minute, Rachel." Scott took a book off his desk and opened it to a picture that went across two pages. "Do you think we could build something like this?"

Rachel saw a bright-colored picture of a castle. "Let's try," she said.

The children started to build a square tower.

The stock car racer shot out from under the bed. Chester steered it around the room. The car was so small now that it could dart under the radiator and circle around each leg of Scott's desk chair.

Rachel and Scott finished their tower. They had left spaces between the blocks at the top to make notches.

Chester parked the stock car racer beside the Build-Anything Kit. He watched the children make a wall around the castle.

The top of the wall was notched, too. On each corner there was a tower.

Chester saw Rachel make an opening in one side of the wall.

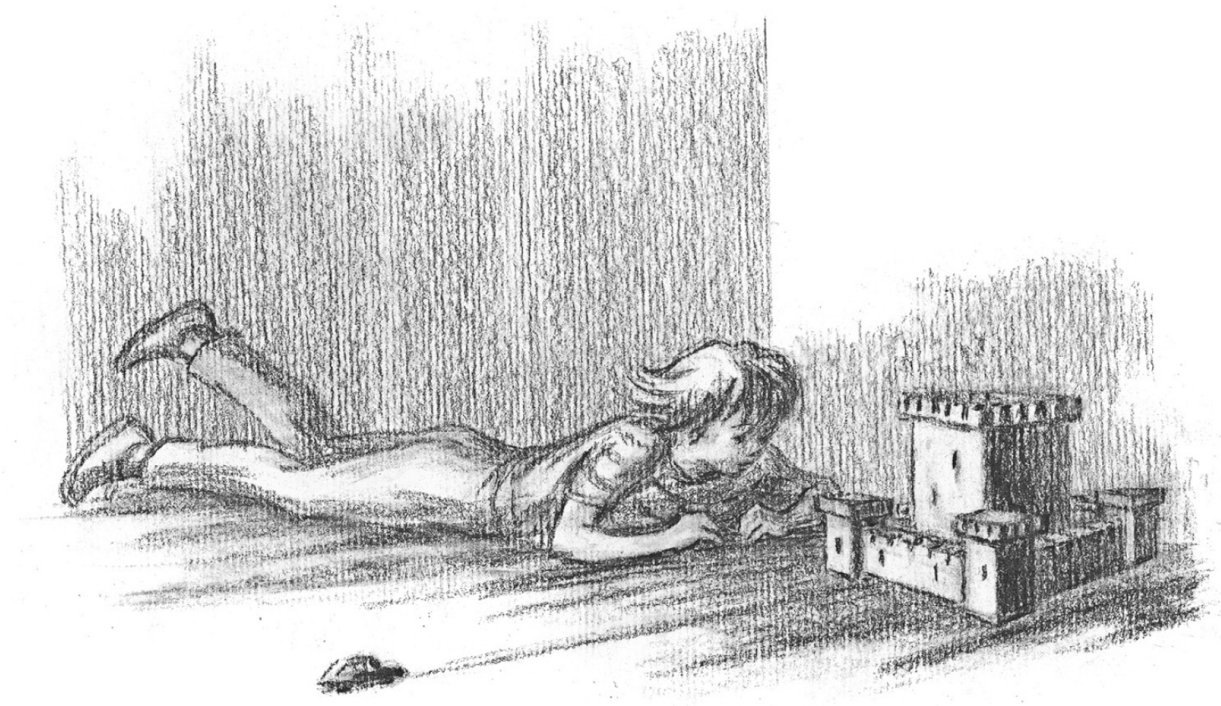
"This will be the gate," she said.

Scott looked at it. "Now it's almost like a real castle."

There was a little click. Scott and Rachel turned to see the door of the stock car open. Chester stepped out. He walked quickly to the wall they had built and slipped through the open gate into the castle.

12

Rachel lay on her stomach and looked into the castle. “I don’t see Chester anywhere. He must be hiding from us.”



“If Chester is running around loose, he might get stepped on,” Scott said. “You never should have told me to take him out of my toothbrush glass. He was safe in there. I don’t want anything to happen to him, Rachel.”

“Neither do I,” Rachel said. “I never meant to make him quite so small. It would be my fault if something terrible happened to him.” She dug far down in her jeans pocket and pulled out the magic sizer.

“What are you going to do?” Scott asked her.

“I’m going to make this gateway big enough for us to go in and get Chester.” Rachel tapped the castle wall next to the gate with the little

hammer.

A moment later, Scott whispered, “What’s happening to the castle?”

Rachel stared. “It’s getting bigger, *much* bigger.”

The castle wall reached far above them. It was made of huge blocks of stone. They couldn’t see Scott’s bedroom now.

Rachel put the hammer back into her pocket.

Scott looked around. “There’s a moat!”

The moat was crossed by a drawbridge. On the other side of the bridge, there was another wall with a walk along the top that led from one great tower to the next. Beyond the wall Rachel could see green fields and woods that stretched away into the distance.

Two men with heavy loads of wood on their backs plodded across the bridge and through the open gate. A woman came out with a basket of laundry on her head. A little girl ran after her.

Then a group of men on horseback came riding along a winding road out of the woods. They clattered across the drawbridge and into the castle.

Rachel thought she heard music from somewhere inside the gate. It sounded like something she’d heard before, but she wasn’t sure. “Come on, Scott,” she said. “Let’s go in.”

The stone wall was so thick that it was almost like a tunnel. Rachel and Scott stepped out into a big open courtyard. They blinked in the sunlight.

“It feels like summer here, and it’s still daylight,” Scott said. “We had the lights turned on at home.”

Rachel wrinkled her nose. “This place smells like the bridle path in Prospect Park.”

“Of course. That’s a stable.” Scott pointed to it.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

They peeked through a doorway. A blacksmith was hammering on an anvil over a glowing fire.

Next door a man was training hawks to hunt.

Rachel kept thinking she could hear music, but there was so much going on in the courtyard that she couldn’t tell where it was coming from. Everywhere there seemed to be grunting pigs, clucking hens, and screaming children.

A number of people were baking their own bread at the same time in a big stone oven. Nearby in the cookhouse Scott and Rachel saw an enormous fire. A boy was cranking a huge spit with a whole pig on it. Two men were dropping carrots and turnips and chunks of meat into a big iron pot. Rachel thought they must be making enough stew for an army.

Scott and Rachel came to a well where a woman was filling a clay jug with water. She smiled at them. “You are not from this part of the world,” she said. “Your clothes are like those of the minstrel over there. Did you come with him?”

Now the children saw a red-haired man in a blue denim jacket and jeans sitting on a barrel. He was surrounded by a crowd of people.

It was Chester. And he was playing “Old Man River” on a mouth organ.

13

Rachel walked over to the crowd of people who were listening to Chester play. Scott followed her.

"It's very strange music," a young woman said, "but I like it."

The man next to her nodded. "It ought to have words. Too bad the minstrel can't sing along with those pipes."

Rachel started to sing, " 'Old Man River, that Old Man River, he don't say nothing. He must know something.' "

Scott chimed in, " 'He just keeps rolling. He keeps on rolling along.' "

Chester stopped playing to stare at Scott and Rachel.

"More! More!" the people in the crowd called. They wanted Chester to play and the children to sing the song again. Soon they were all singing along.

When Chester ran out of breath, he put the mouth organ into his pocket. Then he climbed down from the barrel and walked over to Scott and Rachel. "You must be the kids who gave me supper."

"And you must be the burglar who wanted to steal Daddy's television set," Rachel said.

Chester looked away. "Sorry about that," he mumbled. He looked so ashamed that suddenly Rachel was sorry for him. She changed the subject. "You're a whiz with that mouth organ!"

"I'm not anything special. I just love to play," Chester told her. "I don't think these people have ever seen a mouth organ before." He looked around at the castle courtyard. "Is this more magic?"

"Yes," Rachel told him, "but we didn't mean it to be like this."

“This magic is not bad at all,” Chester said. “Neither was the other—once I got used to it. At first it was scary.”

Chester had freckles and a nice smile. Rachel couldn’t help liking him. She decided to wait until later to find out why he had become a burglar.

“What’s your name?” he asked. “I heard you talking before, but your voices were so loud I never could make out the words.”

“I’m Rachel. This is my brother, Scott.”

“Thanks for letting me drive the stock car racer, Scott,” Chester said. “I always wanted to drive one when I had a job with a carnival, but the racing drivers wouldn’t let anybody touch their cars.”

“It doesn’t drive like most cars,” Scott said.

“The controls are like any other car, only better,” Chester told him. “The big difference is all those fancy gadgets to tell you exactly how hot the oil and the water are.”

Scott thought about this. He looked at Rachel. Both of them were wondering why the racer was different for Chester than it was for them. Rachel thought she knew the answer.

"Why did you leave the car and go into the castle?" Scott asked.

"I wanted to see what the inside of the castle was like." Chester took the mouth organ out of his pocket. He started to play.

"The car wouldn't have been any fun for Chester if it wasn't a real racer," Rachel told her brother.

Scott nodded. "And a real racer wouldn't have been safe for us."

Chester was playing "In the Good Old Summertime."

"He seems to know all the songs Daddy sings in the shower," Rachel whispered. She and Scott joined in with the words. The crowd gathered around them again.

Before long everybody was singing. They thought the words of this song were very funny. One young man called the girl next to him "Tootsie-wootsie." This made them both laugh so hard they couldn't sing.

Suddenly everybody was quiet except for Chester and Rachel and Scott.

Rachel saw a tall man walking toward them. He was dressed in a long blue tunic and carried a pole with a brass ball on top. The people bowed and made way for him.

Chester put away his mouth organ. Scott and Rachel stopped singing.

The tall man walked over to them. "As the steward here, I wish to welcome the minstrels and ask if they will dine tonight in the great hall and entertain the lord of the castle."

Scott bowed. Chester looked at him and bowed, too. Rachel remembered a movie she had seen on television last week. She made the best dancing school curtsy she could manage in jeans.

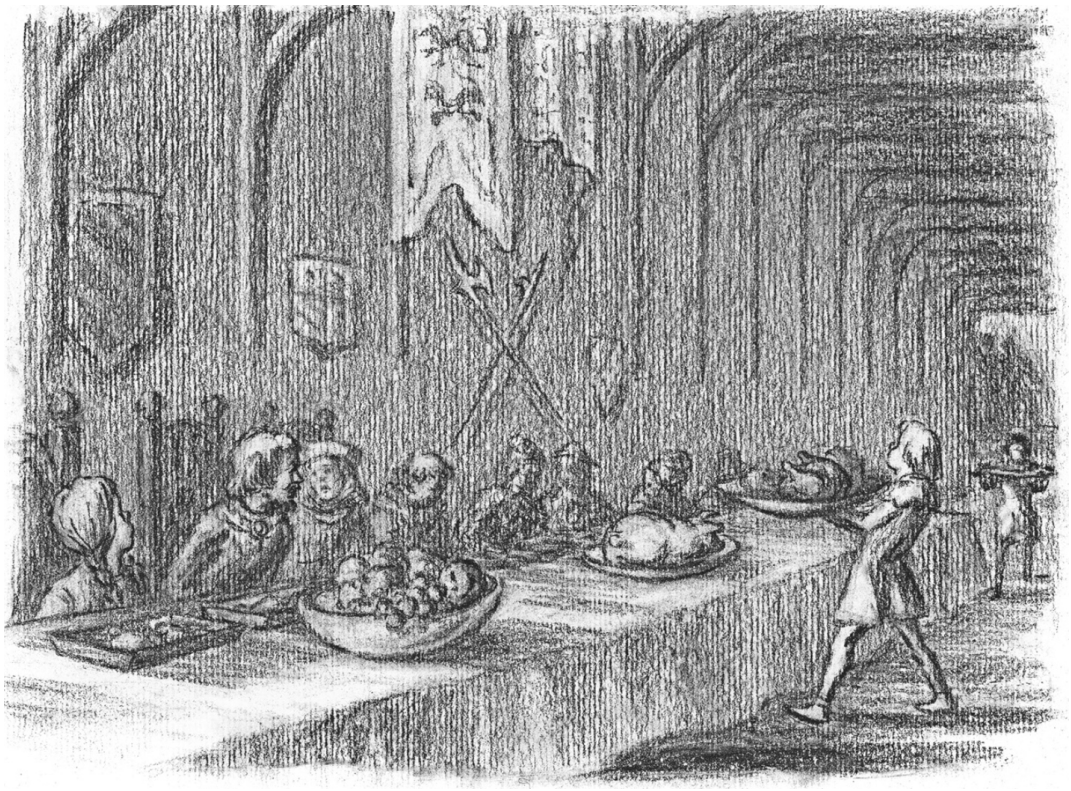
"Thank you, sir," she said. "We are honored by your invitation."

14

After the steward left, Chester took out his mouth organ and played "Old MacDonald Had a Farm." Rachel was surprised at how much these grown-up people enjoyed the song. They barked and meowed and oinked. Finally, they took each other by the hand and began to skip back and forth in a kind of round dance.

It was not until the steward came back again that the crowd would let Chester stop playing.

The steward led Chester and the two children into a very large room with a high ceiling. There were shields along the walls and banners hanging from the rafters. A long table ran down one side of the room, and the stone floor was covered with rushes.



“This is the great hall of the castle,” the steward whispered. “And before you is the earl, his countess, and Lady Isabel.”

Rachel saw a man in a beautiful embroidered tunic. Beside him was a lady and a girl not much older than Rachel. The rest of the people at the table were men. All of them were dressed in clothes that were much nicer than the people in the courtyard wore.

The table was piled high with food. More food was being brought in by boys carrying trays. Some of them were younger than Rachel and others were teenagers. They, too, were all well dressed.

On the other side of the hall there was another, smaller table. When the boys had served all the people at the big table, they put the trays down on the small table and sat down to eat. The steward showed Chester, Scott, and Rachel where they could sit on a long bench here. One of the boys put a wooden platter in front of Chester and another in front of the two children. He loaded the platters with stew from a tray on the table.

“We need another plate,” Scott told him.

The boy pointed to the other people in the room. Each pair of diners was sharing a platter. “It’s the custom here,” the boy explained. “The minstrel makes an uneven number, so he has a platter to himself.”

There were no forks. The men and boys cut up the meat with knives that they wore on their belts. Chester had a pocketknife that he used. He cut up the meat for Rachel and Scott. They ate with their fingers.

“I didn’t have a fork at your house, either,” Chester reminded them.

“We didn’t have the right-size fork for you,” Rachel told him. “We weren’t expecting you to come to our house. Why did you?”

Chester didn’t answer.

Scott saw that Chester’s face had turned bright pink. “This is the second dinner we’ve had today,” Scott said.

Rachel licked her fingers. “Now I know why those men were putting so much stuff in that pot. It’s so good I wish I had a second

helping."

"No sooner said than done." The boy who had served them smiled. He filled the wooden platter again. "Everybody here is well fed."

"But why are you here?" Scott asked. "You don't look like a servant."

"Of course I'm not a servant!" the boy said. "My father is a knight, and someday I'll be a knight, too. But I can't be knighted unless I'm trained to be one. I'm a page here. When I'm older, I'll be a squire and serve one of the knights."

Rachel looked at the big table. "Are all those men knights?"

The boy shook his head. "Can't you see that one of them is a friar?"

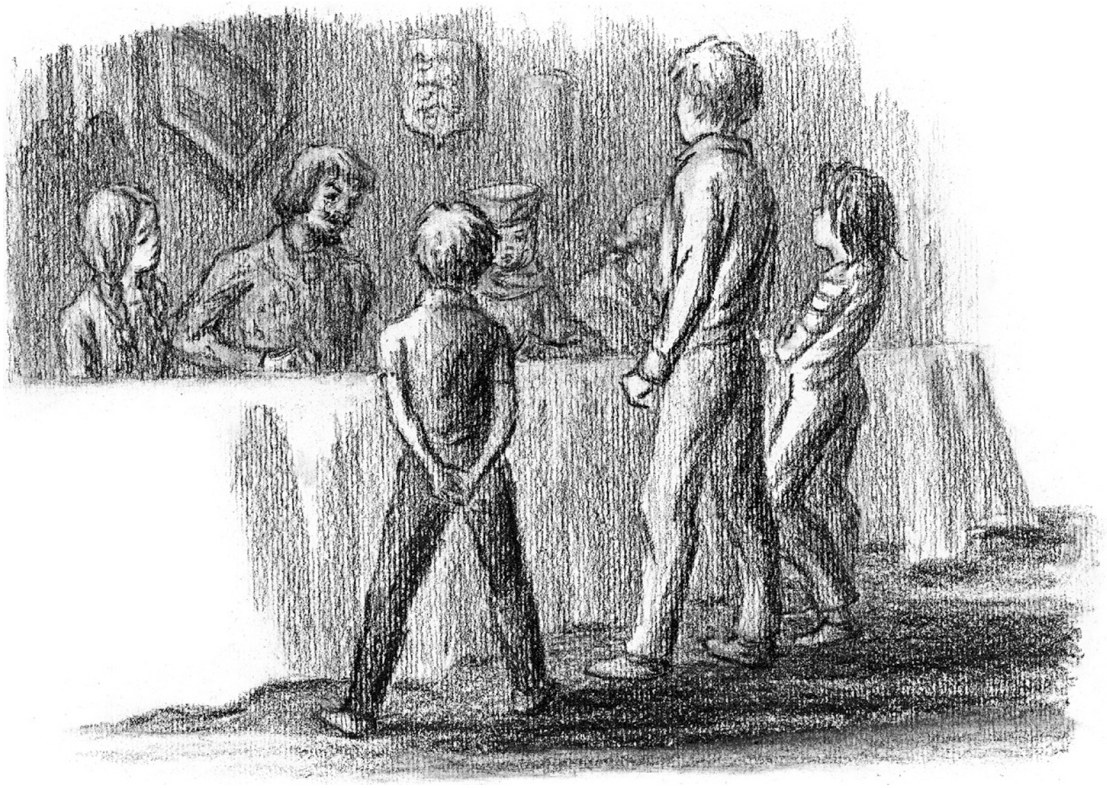
Rachel felt foolish. She hadn't noticed the man in the brown habit of a monk. "Why is he here?" she asked.

"You don't know anything, do you?" The boy laughed. "Somebody in the castle has to be able to read!"

15

When the meal was finished, the steward walked over to Chester and the children. “Come with me.”

He led them to the table where the knights were sitting. They stopped right in front of the earl.



“Here are the minstrels you heard in the courtyard, my lord.” The steward bowed and left.

“I bid you welcome to my house,” the earl said. “And I would like to hear your songs.”

“Thank you, my lord.” Chester made a deep bow. He took the mouth organ out of his pocket and began to play.

He played all the songs the crowd in the courtyard liked so much. The earl and his knights seemed to enjoy them, too. They laughed and clapped their hands, but they didn't sing along. Lady Isabel watched her mother and father. She didn't clap until they did.

Chester played "Yankee Doodle" and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." Then he stopped.

"Now," the earl said, "tell us about your travels."

Chester rubbed his chin. "I've had a most unusual day, my lord. I'll try to remember it for you."

All the people at the big table stopped talking and leaned forward to listen.

Chester began, "It was late in the day. Marty and I were walking past a row of old houses. Marty saw that the door of one of them was wide open. 'Why don't you go in and see if there's something we could use in there?' he said. 'You could just pick it up and be off.'

" 'That's a good way to get into trouble,' I told him. I started to walk past the house.

" 'Look,' Marty said. 'The door's still open. And there are no lights on in that house. I'll bet nobody's home. You could be in and out like a flash.'

" 'Forget it, Marty. Let's go get a pizza.' I grabbed his arm and tried to pull him away.

"Marty's a big guy. I couldn't get him to budge.

" 'You're a coward, Chet!' He swung me around to face the open door. 'Now get in there and cop something or I'm finished with you for good.'

"Now, I wasn't going to let Marty call me a coward. Next thing I knew I had run up the front steps of the house and up the stairs inside as well."

Chester looked nervous now. Rachel again found herself feeling sorry for him.

The earl was waiting for the rest of the story.

Chester stood as tall as he could and swallowed a couple of times. Then he went on.

“At the top of the stairs there was a hallway with a lot of doors. I opened the first door and went inside. There was a television set in the room. That’s the kind of thing you can always sell.”

The earl held up his hand. “What is this set you’re talking about?”

Chester stared at him. Then he looked around at the knights and the banners. He thought for a minute. “It’s a box with a glass window that can show you almost anything you want to see—dancing, singing, people fighting, playing games, wild animals, just everything.”

The earl smiled. “So of course you were glad your friend forced you to do the bold deed.”

“I wasn’t all that glad,” Chester said. “But I took out my screwdriver and was going to take the set when someone started yelling and hitting me on the back. I tried to get away, but I couldn’t. Then I heard voices so loud they hurt my ears. A giant hand picked me up and dropped me into a tower of glass. I tried to climb out, but the walls were too slippery. I was caught in a trap, and I couldn’t escape!”

16

No one in the great hall made a sound as Chester told his story. They all listened to every word.

He didn't stop till he came to the part where he slipped through the open gate into the castle. "I found myself in a sunny courtyard with a blue sky overhead." He took out his mouth organ and played "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning." Rachel and Scott sang the words.

The earl stood up. "A wonderful tale! I never heard anything like it. Steward, give this to the minstrel." He handed a silk purse to the steward.

Chester bowed. He took the purse and slipped it into his jacket pocket. Then he bowed again. “Thank you, my lord.”

Dinner was over. Outdoors the sun had set. The room was getting dark.

The earl and his countess were first to leave the hall. Then their daughter, the Lady Isabel, followed with the friar.

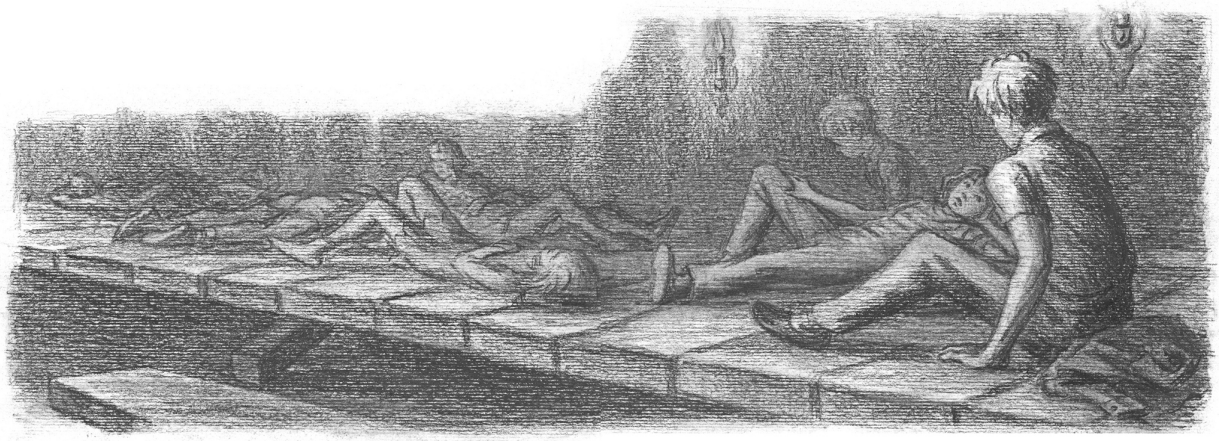
Rachel smiled at the other girl. Lady Isabel gave a shy smile in return.

Next the knights and their squires went out.

Now it was up to the pages to clear the food from the tables. They took it out to the courtyard and gave it to the poor people who were waiting there in the twilight.

The pages returned to climb onto the bare tables. They folded their woolen cloaks to make pillows under their heads. Then they lay down to sleep.

The steward finished lighting a few stubby candles set in iron holders on the walls. He came over to Chester and the two children. “You are welcome to spend the night here,” he said. He looked around at the sleeping pages. Then he walked out of the room, holding the pole with the brass ball on top.



“Everybody seems to go to bed early here.” Chester used the bench as a step to get onto the table. He reached down to help Rachel, and then Scott, climb up.

There was plenty of room for all of them to lie down. Chester took off his jacket and started to fold it to make a pillow.

“Oh, I almost forgot this.” He took out the silk purse and opened it. “Let’s see what we have here.” He poured out a handful of silver coins. “These aren’t like anything we have at home, but they may come in handy. It looks as if the dream will last for a while.” He thought for a minute. “It doesn’t seem like a dream. You said it was magic, Rachel. Can you tell me more about it?”

The candles along the wall were getting shorter. One of them flickered and went out.

Scott lay down on the table. He turned over on his stomach and rested his head on his arms. A moment later he was asleep.

Rachel spoke in a whisper so as not to disturb her brother or any of the other sleeping boys. She told Chester about the Build-Anything Kit. “There’s a little gadget in the kit that makes things bigger and smaller,” Rachel told him.

Chester heard how they built the stock car racer. “I had fun with that,” he said.

The last candle went out. The great hall was very dark. Rachel curled up into a ball like a tired kitten. She fell asleep with Scott on one side of her and Chester on the other.

17

Rachel woke to the sound of a rooster crowing. She sat up and looked around. It was dark in the great hall of the castle, but through one of the tall windows, Rachel saw that the sky outside was turning gray.

The page boys were sleeping soundly. So was Scott. And Chester was snoring. Rachel felt stiff all over. She wiggled over to the edge of the tabletop and stepped onto the long bench and from there to the floor.

Rachel tiptoed across the rushes on the floor to the door of the hall. She slipped out into the cool morning air.

The well was on the other side of the courtyard. Rachel went over to it. An iron spout jutted from the wall above the well, and water was dripping from it into a stone basin.

Rachel cupped her hands to take a drink. Then she washed her face and ran her damp fingers through her hair.

"Good morning," someone said.

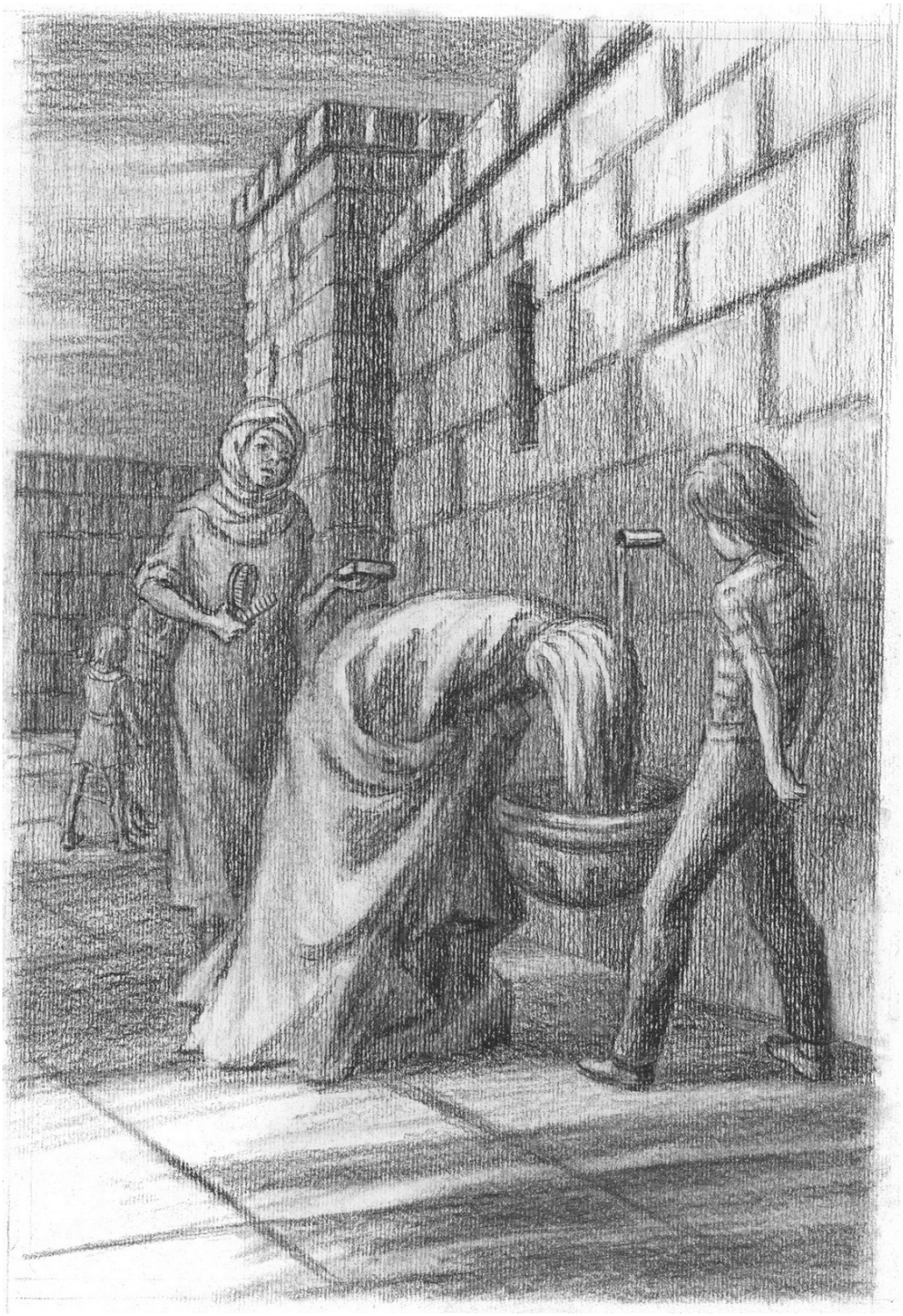
Rachel looked up to see Lady Isabel. "Good morning," she answered.

A woman in an apron was standing behind the earl's daughter. She was holding an armful of linen, a little silver box, and a brush and comb.

Rachel smiled at her. The woman bobbed up and down in a funny little curtsy.

"Ethel is going to wash my hair," Lady Isabel said.

Rachel watched as Ethel first unbraided Lady Isabel's long hair and then wrapped her from the neck down in yards of linen. After that, Lady Isabel bent over the stone basin and let the water drip on her head.



Ethel opened the silver box and took out a cake of soap. She used this to wash Lady Isabel's hair and then carefully put the soap back

into the box.

When the cold water had rinsed away all the lather, Ethel used the linen to dry Lady Isabel's hair. Finally she set to work combing it.

While Ethel was busy with the braids, Lady Isabel said, "I'm glad you came. It's so lonely here. There's no one my age I can talk to."

"What about the page boys?" Rachel asked.

"I'm not allowed to be alone with men and boys," Lady Isabel told her, "except for the friar." She lowered her voice to a whisper. "He's teaching me to *read*! Isn't that wonderful? And he's promised not to tell my mother. She thinks all a girl should know is how to sew. I hate sewing."

"So do I," Rachel said.

The sun was up now, and people were coming into the courtyard. The door of the great hall was open. Page boys were running in and out carrying trays of food.

"You'd better go back. They'll be serving breakfast soon," Lady Isabel said. "Before you go, tell me your name."

"It's Rachel. And I'm glad I met you, too." Rachel ran back to the great hall.

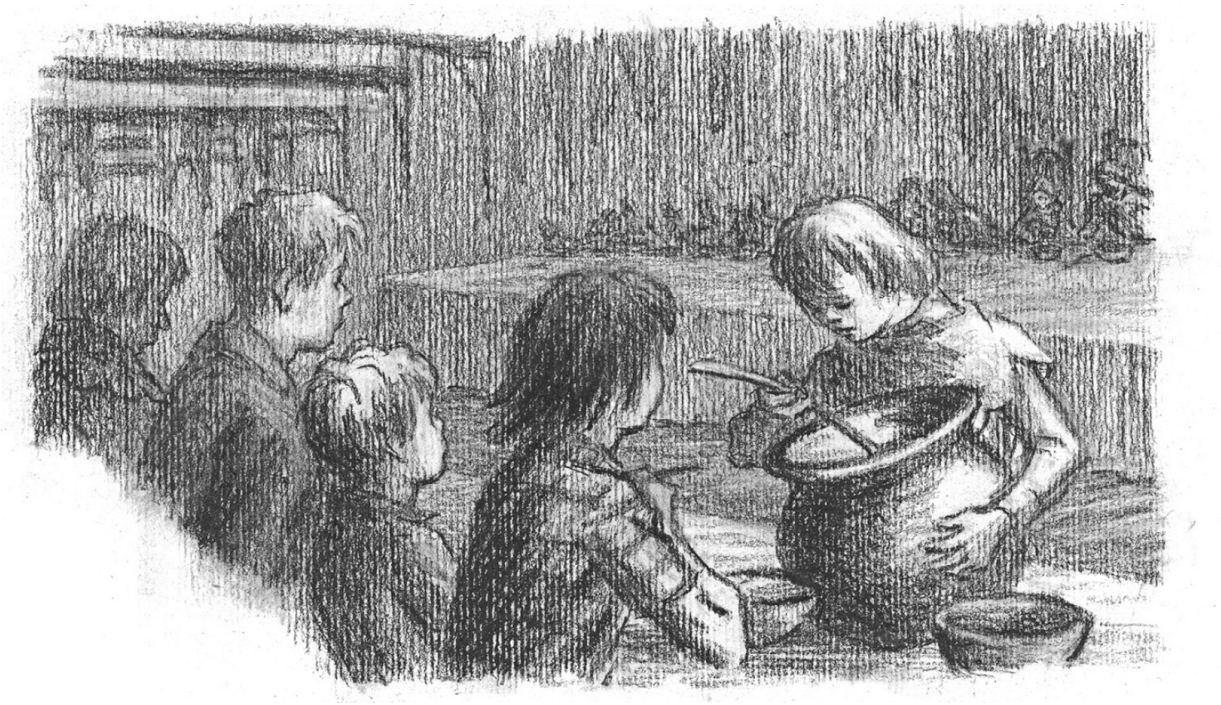
Scott and Chester were looking for her.

"You had us worried," Chester said. "We thought something might have happened to you."

"I didn't want to wake you," Rachel said. "I went out to get a drink of water, and I made a friend."

16

Nobody was sleeping on the tables in the great hall now. The knights were all seated in their places before the earl and his family came in. Rachel, Scott, and Chester were at the smaller table, just as they had been the night before.



The page boys set out brown bowls and filled them with steaming porridge. There were spoons made of horn for the people at the main table, but Rachel and the others had to eat with crude wooden spoons that looked like scoops. Rachel didn't mind. She was hungry.

When the bowls were cleared away, the pages put down wooden platters and brought out trays of cold meat. Rachel and Scott again shared a platter.

“It’s sort of weird to have cold roast pork for breakfast,” Scott said.

“All these people are eating as if they don’t know when they’ll get another meal,” Chester pointed out. “Maybe we should, too.” He picked up a bone and started to gnaw on it.

The lord of the castle stood up. “Good morning, gentlemen,” he said. “If any of you wish to go to the fair in Mansfield, you may join the company that will leave the inner gate in an hour’s time.”

“That would be a good place for you minstrels to be,” the page boy next to Chester said.

Everybody seemed excited at the idea of the fair. They rushed to finish the meal. The pages hurried to clear away the remains of the food and take it out to the poor people waiting in the courtyard. Then they raced out to join the people gathering at the gate.

Rachel saw that Lady Isabel was talking to her mother. The countess shook her head, but Lady Isabel went on talking. The countess turned to the earl and said something. He talked to his daughter and then to the friar. The friar spoke for quite a long time. At last, the earl smiled and nodded to his daughter. Rachel saw Lady Isabel clasp her hands as if to keep from clapping for joy.

“What about it, kids,” Chester said. “Do you want to go to the fair?”

“It must be fun. Everybody seems to be going,” Scott told him.

The children followed Chester out of the great hall to the courtyard. They had to go through the thick wall to where the drawbridge went across the moat. Already a group of people was standing there, but Rachel saw that there were only ten knights in the company. She guessed the others were staying behind to guard the castle.

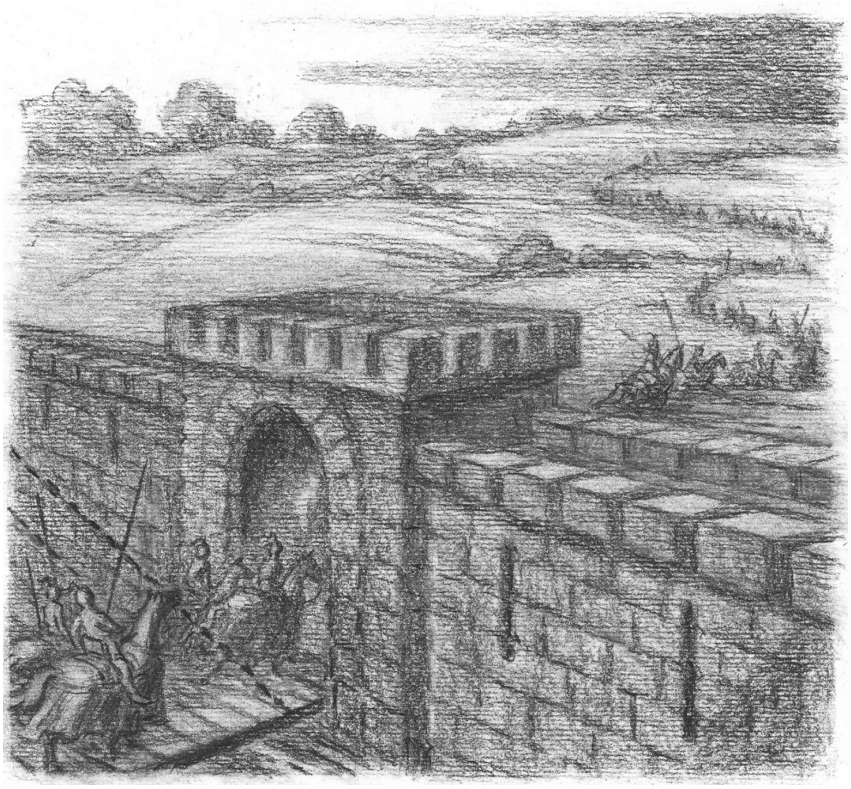
The knights were on horseback and wore heavy armor. Behind each knight came a squire, who was also on horseback. Both the knights and the squires carried swords.

The company seemed to be waiting for someone. Finally, Lady Isabel came riding through the gate on a little white horse. Ethel rode behind her on a donkey.

All the knights and their squires raised their swords in greeting to the earl's daughter. A knight on a coal-black horse rode forward to lead Lady Isabel to her place in the cavalcade.

Five knights and their squires rode first across the bridge. Then came Lady Isabel and Ethel. After them walked Rachel, Scott, and Chester, along with the page boys and many of the people from the courtyard. The other five knights and their squires rode in the rear.

They crossed the drawbridge and trooped through the gate in the outer wall of the castle to the bright green fields on the other side.



19

"Come and walk beside me, Rachel," Lady Isabel said. "I'm glad you also are going to the fair. We can get to know each other better."

Lady Isabel was wearing a long blue dress. She was riding with both her legs on the same side of the horse.

"Is the town far from here?" Rachel asked.

"I could get there in an hour if I were allowed to ride like a boy," the earl's daughter told her, "but I'm lucky my father let me go at all. The friar told him it was time I saw something of the world outside the castle. I've never been to the fair before."

"Scott and I went to a fair last summer. It was lots of fun," Rachel said. "We ate cotton candy and rode on the Ferris wheel."

The narrow dirt road wound between green fields where people were working. They bowed and touched their foreheads as the

company from the castle passed them. Rachel waved to a girl with a hooked stick who was guiding a flock of sheep across the road.

On the other side of the fields, the knights led the way into a dark wood. Great spreading trees hung over the road.

"There are outlaws in these woods," Lady Isabel said.

The horsemen rode faster, and the people on foot had to walk faster to keep up with them. Rachel couldn't talk to Lady Isabel now.

The forest seemed to go on and on. Rachel was getting tired. Scott started to lag behind. Chester took hold of Rachel's hand on one side and Scott's on the other. "We'd better keep together," he said. "I wouldn't want you kids getting lost here."

The sun was climbing higher in the sky. Here and there a shaft of light came through the leaves. Rachel wanted to stop and listen to the blackbird singing in an old oak tree and take a drink from the cool water of a spring that bubbled beside the road. But she had to keep walking.

At last they came out of the shadows of the forest. Up ahead, the roofs and spires of a town were shining in the sunlight.

"That is Mansfield," Lady Isabel said.

20

Rachel hoped the knights would go more slowly now that they were out of the woods. Instead, the sight of the town seemed to excite them. They rode even faster.

Everybody wanted to get to the market square, which was lined with stalls where things were for sale. When they reached the square, they rushed around, trying to see and do everything in the time before they would have to go back to the castle.

Rachel had a funny feeling that some of the women were staring at her. She stayed close to Chester and Scott.

The three of them walked past the booth where people were buying woolen cloth. They stopped to watch a tinker who was mending copper pots, and they looked at brass buttons and buckles that were for sale.

Scott stopped at a stand where a woman was selling caps. He picked up a brown leather cap with a blue feather on it. “Let’s see if this fits you, Chester.”

Chester tried it on. Both Rachel and Scott liked the way he looked in it so much that Chester bought the cap.

A huge cask of ale was set up under an awning. The knights were drinking big mugs of it.

Chester bought a basket of blackberries from a little girl. Rachel and Scott helped him eat them. They all drank water from the well in the marketplace. Then Chester took the children into a cookshop. They bought something the woman making them called “cakes.” These seemed more like cookies to Scott and Rachel.

In the center of the square, the knights were looking at horses. Lady Isabel wanted to buy a speckled-gray pony, but the knight in charge of the company talked her out of it.

Chester took out his mouth organ and began to play “Home on the Range.” This was one of Mr. Walker’s favorites. Scott and Rachel

knew the words. They sang it all the way through.

Even the knights joined in singing this time, along with the pages, and all the people in the market square. Everybody held hands and danced around and around.

Chester played and played, and the people danced as if they'd never stop. Lady Isabel looked as if she'd never had so much fun in all her life.

Afterward Scott passed around the new cap, and the dancers filled it with silver coins.

21

The sun was still high in the sky when the squires rounded up the people from the castle for the return journey.

The knights were sleepy from the ale they had drunk. Everybody was worn out from dancing. They all went slower than in the morning.

Ethel rode beside Lady Isabel and talked to her as they jogged along.

After they came to the forest Lady Isabel's little horse began to limp. She stopped riding. The whole company came to a halt.

The knight in charge rode over to see what was wrong. "Your horse has lost a shoe. I'll send two of the squires back to look for it. In the meantime, we can all give our horses a rest." He got off his horse and helped the earl's daughter down from hers.

Lady Isabel sat on a mossy bank under an enormous beech tree. Ethel tied her donkey to a bush and came over to be near her.

Scott and Chester walked around looking at the horses and talking to the squires who tended them.

Lady Isabel patted the soft moss beside her. "Sit here, Rachel. I haven't seen much of you all day. And there's something I must tell you."

Rachel sat down beside her. The earl's daughter spoke in a very low voice. "Ethel has been talking to her friends today. What the people from the castle are saying about you is frightening. And I'm afraid some of it is my fault."

"What do you mean?" Rachel asked.

"They say you are a witch and have put a spell on me." Lady Isabel's eyes filled with tears. "They saw us talking this morning by

the well and again when you walked beside my horse." She looked around. "And my sitting by you now will make things even worse.

"Oh, Rachel, you can't know how wonderful it is for me to talk to you. I feel as if I could tell you all my thoughts. The friar is the only other person I can really talk to. But he's a man and can't understand the things that trouble me."

Rachel looked around. The knights and squires and the other men were busy talking to each other. But the women and girls were silently watching Rachel and Lady Isabel.

Rachel wanted to take her friend's hand, but she couldn't let the watching eyes see her do it. "Why do they think I'm a witch? I didn't turn you into a frog. And I didn't fly here on a broom."

Lady Isabel laughed. Then she was serious again. "It's not a joke, Rachel. The friar reads a great deal, and he is wiser than anyone else here. But even he can't explain how you got here or where you came from."

"I can't explain it, either," Rachel said. "It was magic all right, but it wasn't wicked magic. Not at all!"

"I believe you, Rachel," Lady Isabel said, "but no one else will. The most difficult thing for the women to understand is the way the man

and boy who are your companions treat you. They are sure you have them in your power and have put them under a terrible spell."

22

Rachel stared at Lady Isabel. “I don’t understand why anybody would think I had Scott and Chester in my power. Can you tell me?”

“It’s because,” Lady Isabel whispered, “they never give you orders!”

Rachel laughed. “But Scott’s my little brother. And Chester isn’t my father. He’s just a friend. If he were my father, I’d have to obey him.”

“My brother used to tell me what I could and could not do,” Lady Isabel said. “He’s a page in my uncle’s house now. If my father were not here, both my mother and I would have to do whatever my brother wanted.”

Rachel thought about this. “You mean, even when you’re grown up, your brother could boss you?”

“Unless I was married,” Lady Isabel said. “Then my husband would give me orders.”

“Couldn’t you marry someone who wasn’t the bossy sort?” Rachel asked.

“I’ll have to marry the man my father chooses for me,” Lady Isabel told her.

For a minute Rachel didn’t say anything. Then she cried, “That’s awful!”

Lady Isabel took both Rachel’s hands in her own. She looked into her eyes. “It isn’t nearly as awful as what people do to witches,” she said. “Rachel, you have to get away. They’re talking about putting you in chains and throwing you in the dungeon of the castle. That’s a horrible place, damp and dark and full of rats.”

Lady Isabel made her voice very low. “*Terrible* things are done to witches, Rachel. It isn’t safe for you to go back to the castle.”

Rachel felt for the magic sizer in the pocket of her jeans. Then she began to search in all her other pockets. She couldn’t find the sizer in any of them.

Rachel ran her fingers over the mossy bank, but the sizer was not there.

It might be back in the market square, she thought, or lying somewhere along the road where Rachel had walked today. There was no use looking for it, because the sizer was invisible until someone touched it.

Rachel felt sick. She was sure of only one thing—now neither she nor Scott could ever go home again.

23

The two squires came galloping down the dirt road. They had found the missing horseshoe near a patch of daisies.

With the help of the blacksmith, the squires nailed the shoe back on the horse's hoof. The cavalcade started off again.

When the knights rode out of the forest and along the road through the green fields, the sky was beginning to turn pink.

Rachel was walking between Scott and Chester. She had said nothing to them of Lady Isabel's warning. Maybe if she told Scott to order her around, the women would stop thinking she had enchanted him. But Rachel was afraid Scott would make a game of it. And she was sure she'd end up screaming at him.

There was no sense in frightening them. Anyway, if anything happened to her, Rachel somehow knew that Chester would take care of Scott.

Chester had put the coins they had earned into the purse the earl had given him. He wore the brown cap with the blue feather pushed back on his red hair and strode along with his head held high. “I never knew what I wanted to do for a living,” he told the children. “I like being a minstrel better than anything I’ve ever done.”

Scott was quiet. Then he said, “Maybe you could get a job playing the mouth organ when we go home.”

“Are you thinking of going home soon?” Chester asked.

“Well, I want to see Mom and Dad,” Scott told him. “And these kids aren’t much fun. All they talk about is fighting. That’s just about the only thing anybody ever teaches them.” Scott kicked a lump of dirt. “Besides, I’d like a bowl of cornflakes for breakfast and a chocolate chip ice cream cone once in a while.”

Rachel listened in silence. Then she said, “Chester, if you had a chance, would you want to stay here?”

“Yes,” he said. “I’ve heard that minstrels are welcome wherever they go. They bring the only news and music the people here have. I like ice cream just as much as Scott does, and I still remember the giant brownie you gave me for supper. But there are other things that matter more. I could be happy eating blackberries and playing my mouth organ.”

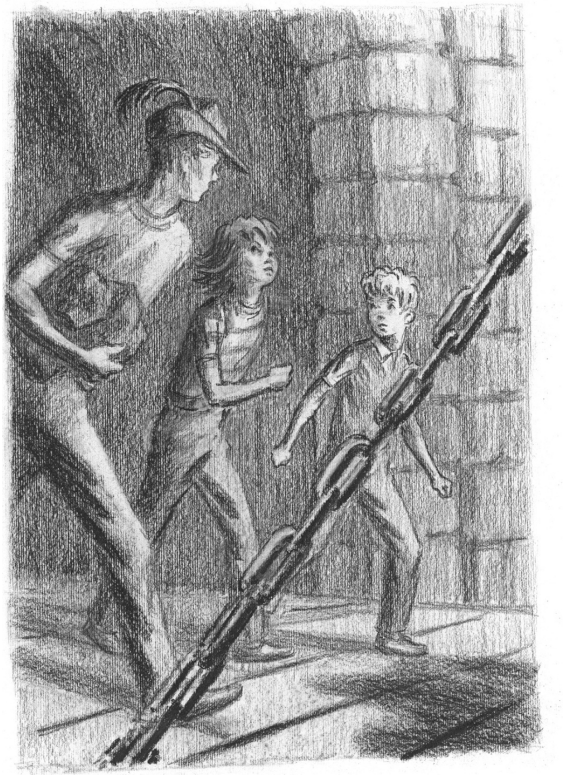
“But what about your family? Won’t they wonder what happened to you?” Scott asked.

“My mother and father were circus people,” Chester told him. “They were killed in an accident when I was twelve. I grew up taking care of myself by doing odd jobs in circuses and carnivals. I’ve been traveling around, looking for a place to call home. Now, at last, I’ve found it.”

In the distance, they could make out the tops of the square towers. They walked behind the knights and squires until they came to the

outer wall of the castle. The men at arms inside opened the heavy gate, and the cavalcade rode through it onto the drawbridge.

It was nearly dark by the time Scott, Chester, and Rachel started over the bridge.



Rachel's heart was beating fast. Would there be people inside the castle waiting for her with chains?

Chester was talking. Rachel was glad to think about something else.

"Last night I had a hard time getting to sleep," he was saying. "I kept rolling onto something hard and lumpy on that tabletop."

"Like *The Princess and the Pea*," Scott said.

"Exactly," Chester agreed. "I finally got hold of the thing and stuffed it into my jacket pocket. Let's see if it's still there." He was carrying his jacket, and he had to unroll it to get at the pocket.

Rachel looked up to see the first star of evening shining in the sky. She made a wish.

Chester pulled something out of his pocket. “I’d like to give you a present, Rachel. I don’t know what it’s good for, except for you to remember me by.” He handed her a little two-headed hammer of clear plastic.

Rachel ran her fingers over the magic sizer. “Thank you, Chester,” she said. “I can use it.” She touched his arm. “Chester, if you really want to stay here, go into the castle and leave us outside. And if we don’t see you again, good luck!”

They had come to the other side of the bridge. Chester bent down and hugged them both at the same time. Then he walked through the open gate into the castle courtyard.

Rachel pulled Scott into the shadows. She waited until the last knight and squire had galloped over the bridge and through the gate. Then she went over to the castle wall and tapped it three times with the big hammerhead.

24

As soon as she touched it, the castle started to shrink.

Scott was standing next to Rachel. She had a tight grip on his arm.

In almost no time, he blinked and looked around. “Hey, Rachel, we’re back in my room!”

Rachel let go of her brother’s arm. “And there’s the castle.” She pointed to the floor.

The castle was once more the one they had made with the Build-Anything Kit. The big blue box was beside it.

Rachel was still holding the magic hammer. She bent down and put it into the box with the rest of the kit. Then she put the lid on the box.

There was the sound of the front door opening downstairs. Scott and Rachel heard their mother calling them. They ran downstairs. Mr. and Mrs. Walker were in the front hall.

“Hi, kids!” Mr. Walker went to hang his coat in the hall closet.

Rachel picked up the package from the chair in the hall and gave it to her mother.

Mrs. Walker handed it to her husband.

“What’s this?” he asked.

“Something I saw an ad for,” Mrs. Walker told him. “It seemed like something you would like.”

Mr. Walker held up a booklet—“Instructions.” There was another book in the package, too. Mr. Walker put both of them on the table and dug down into the box to pull out something wrapped in cotton.

“How did you know I’ve always wanted one of these? And this one is such a beauty!” He held up a shiny new mouth organ.

“This is a music book, Dad!” Scott said.

Rachel opened the book to the first page. “You can learn to play ‘Home on the Range.’ ”

RUTH CHEW

EARTHSTAR MAGIC

Illustrated by the Author

“Ellen,” Ben whispered, “listen!”

Ben Sanders and his sister were lying on their stomachs on an old hunters’ platform. It was built high in an old pine tree.

Ellen heard a rustling noise. She looked over the edge of the platform.

Somebody was crawling around in the woods below. It was a woman in a green sweater and a long brown skirt. She seemed to be looking for something in the dry leaves on the ground.

“Oh dear, oh dear, why did I have to drop it?” Ben and Ellen heard her say.

The woman bent over so far, Ellen thought her nose must be on the ground. Suddenly Ellen saw her reach out and grab something. The woman dropped it into a small plastic bag. Then she jumped to her feet.

Now Ben and Ellen could see that she was tall and skinny, and her hair was gray.

The woman peeked into the plastic bag. She gave it a little pat and skipped up the path and over the top of the hill.

Ellen was surprised to see her move so fast.

“There’s something funny about her,” Ben said. “I wonder what she has in that bag.”

“Let’s see what she’s up to.” Ellen backed off the platform until her feet touched a board that was nailed to the tree. All the way down to the ground there were boards to use as steps. Ellen climbed down the tree.

Ben came after her. He was two years younger than Ellen. Last year his legs weren’t long enough to reach from one board to the

next. It was still hard for him to climb down from the platform.

A narrow path led up the hill from the foot of the tree. Ben and Ellen started up the path. They tried not to make any noise.

It was dark and shadowy in the woods. Here and there a shaft of sunlight sifted down through the tall trees. A chipmunk squeaked and ran under a stone. High overhead a woodpecker was tapping on the trunk of a tree.

At the top of the hill, Ellen looked down the other side. It was like an open meadow that went down to the big lake far below. The ground was rough and covered with weeds. Ellen saw the woman in the green sweater and brown skirt halfway down the hill. “Look, Ben. There she is.”

Ben was pulling a raspberry off a bush that grew just at the edge of the woods. “Try one of these.”

Ellen tasted a berry. “They’re not ripe yet.” She turned to look at the woman again.

There was no one on the hill.

“That’s funny,” Ellen said. “She was right over there a moment ago.”

“Maybe she’s hidden by the bushes.” Ben stepped out of the woods.

Ellen ran down the slope and jumped over a tiny stream. “Watch your step, Ben.”

Ben had already stepped into a marsh. His sneakers were all wet. “I never knew there was so much water here.”

The two children walked through patches of daisies and around clumps of purple bee balm. On the other side of some cattails they came to a pile of rocks.

“Look, Ben,” Ellen said, “there’s a little pool here.”

Plop! A green frog jumped from a rock into the pool.

Ben bent down to look into the water. “I can’t see him. He must be hiding.”

Ellen got down on her hands and knees at the edge of the pool. She brushed against something that was lying on a rock.

It was a small plastic bag.

2

"Why do people have to leave trash around?" Ellen stuffed the plastic bag into the pocket of her jeans. She could throw it away when she got home.

Ben was still looking for the frog. "See if you can find a stick, Ellen. I want to poke under these rocks."

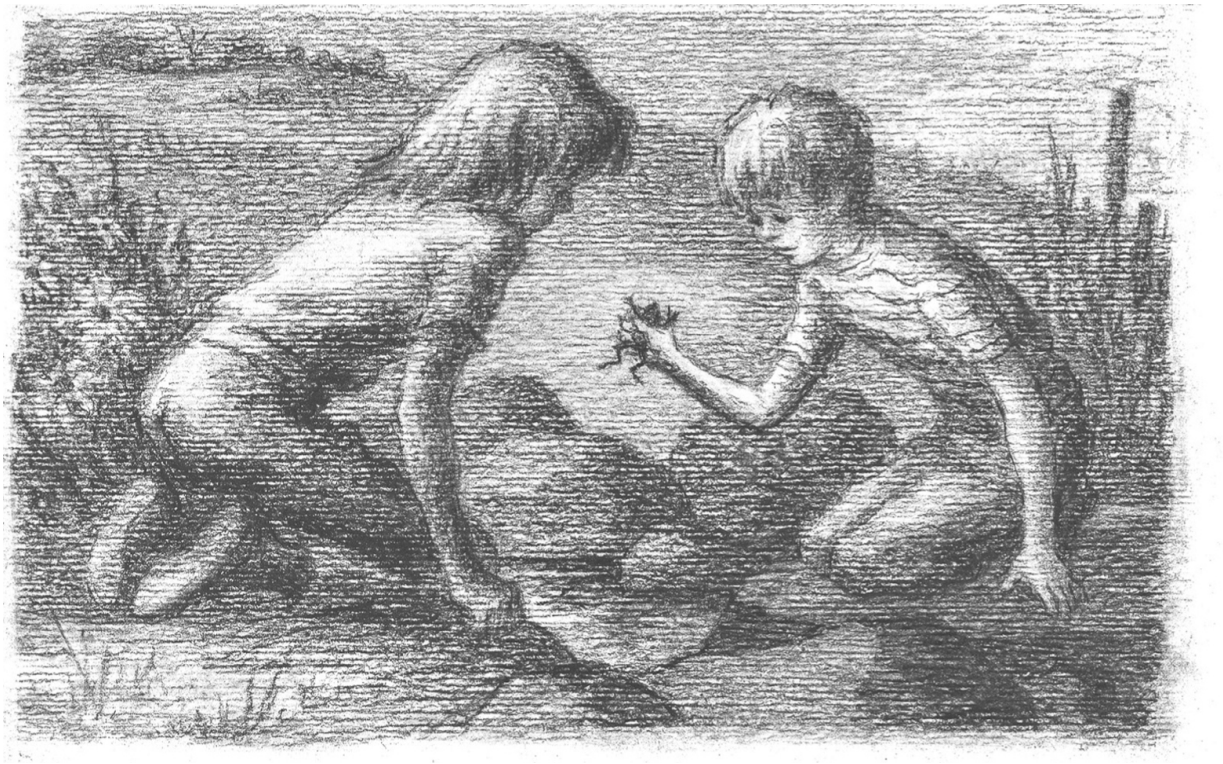
"You might hurt the frog." Ellen leaned over the pool. "Look at those little jelly lumps. Do you think they're frog's eggs, Ben?"

Ben had an idea. "Hey, maybe that was the mother frog! There she is!"

Ellen stared into the pool. "Where?"

The frog was peeking out of a little underwater cave. Ben reached into the pool and made a sudden grab. "Got her!"

The frog wiggled, but Ben held her fast.



“You’re scaring her, Ben,” Ellen said. “Put her back into the water.”

The frog stopped wiggling and looked at Ben with her big eyes. He set her down on a stone at the edge of the pool. The frog sat there without moving.

“There’s something wrong with her,” Ben said. “Why doesn’t she jump back into the water?”

Ellen looked hard at the frog. “Maybe you squeezed her too tight.”

“I didn’t squeeze her at all,” Ben said. “I just held on to her.”

Ellen heard a faraway sound. “Listen!”

Now Ben heard it, too.

Bong! Bong! Bong!

Ellen got to her feet. “We’d better go home. Let’s take the shortcut over the cliff.”

“What about the frog? If she stays out in the open a bird will eat her. There’s a kingfisher that hangs around the cliff. I’m going to take her with me.” Ben picked up the frog. “The eggs don’t need the frog to sit on them.”

Bong! Bong! Bong!

Ellen ran across the hillside. Ben followed her. They went up an old truck trail that curved around another hill. Clumps of small trees hid them from the road and the parking lot by the lake below.

Ellen reached out to touch the fuzzy red fruit of a sumac tree.

Bong! Bong! Bong!

"Hurry!" Ben started to climb the steep hill. Ellen came up after him. They dived into the woods on the other side of the hill. A path went straight down. Ben and Ellen skidded down it. At the bottom of the hill they came out of the woods onto a dirt road.

They raced along till they reached a row of cottages. Their mother was standing on the road near cottage number eight. Mrs. Sanders was banging a big gong. Bong! Bong! Bong!

She looked at Ben and Ellen. "What took you so long?"

“Ben,” Mrs. Sanders said, “you know I don’t let you keep wild things as pets. It isn’t fair to them. They belong outdoors.”

Ben was quiet. He looked down at the little green frog he was holding. The frog looked back at him with big sad eyes.

Ellen followed her mother down the steps from the road and along the path to the cottage. “The frog is hurt, Mother. We want to take care of her until she’s better.”

Mrs. Sanders crossed the wooden runway to the porch. Ben came running down the path. He caught up to his mother. “What can we feed the frog, Mom?”

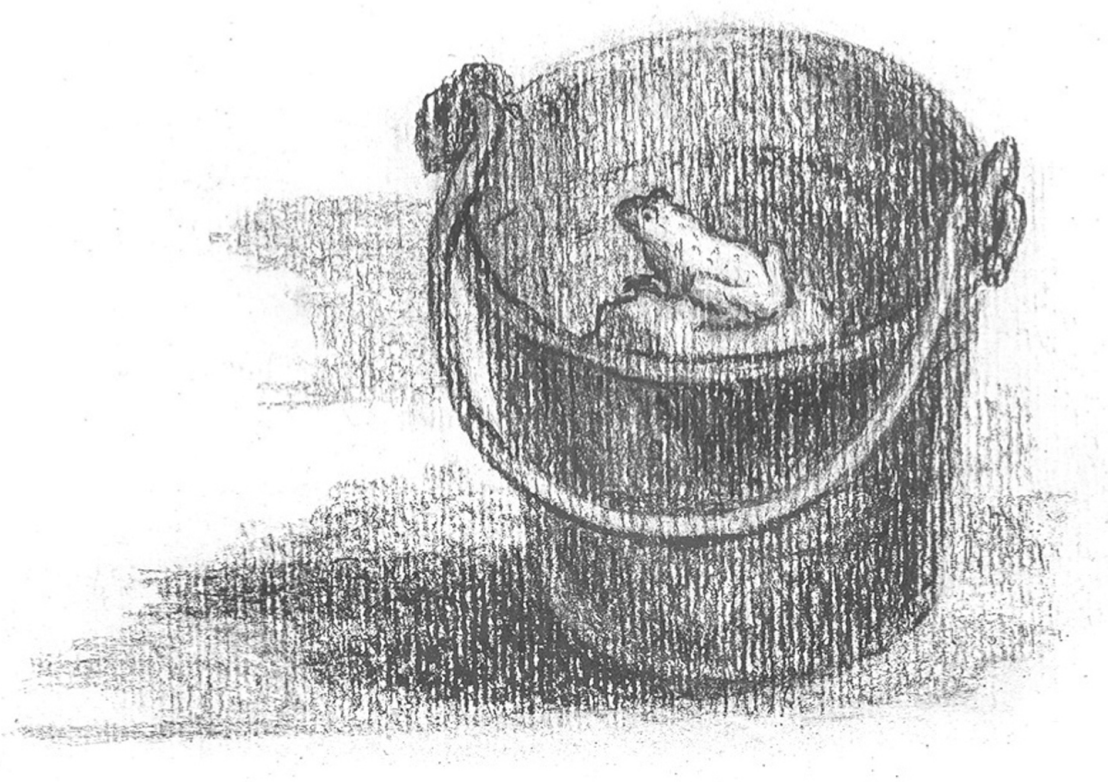
Mrs. Sanders stopped and took another look at the frog. “Maybe they sell fish food in the supermarket in Hawley,” she said. “Your frog will probably eat that.”

Mr. Sanders was stretched out on a deck chair on the porch. He looked up. “Better put that frog in a pail with some water, Ben. And give it a stone to sit on.”

“Be quick about it. Supper’s almost ready.” Mrs. Sanders hung the gong on the knob of the screen door. She went into the cottage.

Ben made a little home for the frog in the scrub pail beside the kitchen sink. Then they all sat down at the big table.

The Sanders family had driven to the cottage from Brooklyn in the morning.



Most of the day had been spent unpacking the car.

When supper was over, Mr. and Mrs. Sanders walked down to the dock. Mr. Sanders wanted to check over the motorboat. Both the boat and the canoe had been stored in a boat house since last summer.

Ellen and Ben stayed in the cottage. Tonight was Ellen's turn to wash the dishes. Ben dried them.

"I saved a piece of meat loaf for the frog." Ellen pulled it out of the pocket of her jeans. She put it on the stone in the pail beside the frog. The frog looked at the meat but didn't eat it.

Ellen felt something else in her pocket. She took it out.

"What do you have there?" Ben asked.

"Trash," Ellen said. "Don't you remember I found it by the pool in the rocks?"

Ben took a good look at the plastic bag. "Ellen," he said, "the woman in the woods was carrying a bag like that."

“There’s something in it.” Ellen opened the bag. She took out a little gray-brown thing that looked like a crocus bulb.

“Let me see it.” Ben reached for the little bulb. It fell out of Ellen’s hand into the pail with the frog.

The frog made a dive for it. But Ben snatched it away. “You can’t eat this, you silly frog. Eat your meat loaf.”

The frog gave a low croak.

Ben was holding the curly little bulb on the palm of his hand. “Look, Ellen!”

Ellen stared. Very slowly the bulb was opening. It spread out six brown points like a star. In the center of the star was a small white puffball.

4

"It's magic!" Ben whispered.

"I've seen a picture of something like this," Ellen said. "It was in a book."

Ben had been thinking. "Ellen," he said, "we never did find out where that woman went. She just disappeared. You know what I think?"

Ellen was still looking at the brown star with the puffball in the middle. "What do you think, Ben?"

"The woman in the woods was a witch," Ben said in a low voice.

Ellen laughed. "Don't be silly, Ben. She was just an old lady picking mushrooms. That's what this thing is. I remember now where I saw the picture. It was in Mother's mushroom book. Come on. I'll show you."

Ben put the little brown star on the drainboard by the sink. He followed Ellen into their parents' bedroom.

There was a stack of books on the dresser. Ellen picked up the bird guide. Under it was a book about wildflowers. Next there was one on trees in America. At the very bottom of the pile was a book as thick as a Brooklyn telephone book.

"One Thousand American Fungi," Ellen read.

Ben looked over Ellen's shoulder. She started to leaf through the book. Suddenly they heard the screen door bang.

"Mom and Dad must have come back," Ben said.

"Mother," Ellen called, "can you help us find something in your mushroom book?"

There was no answer.

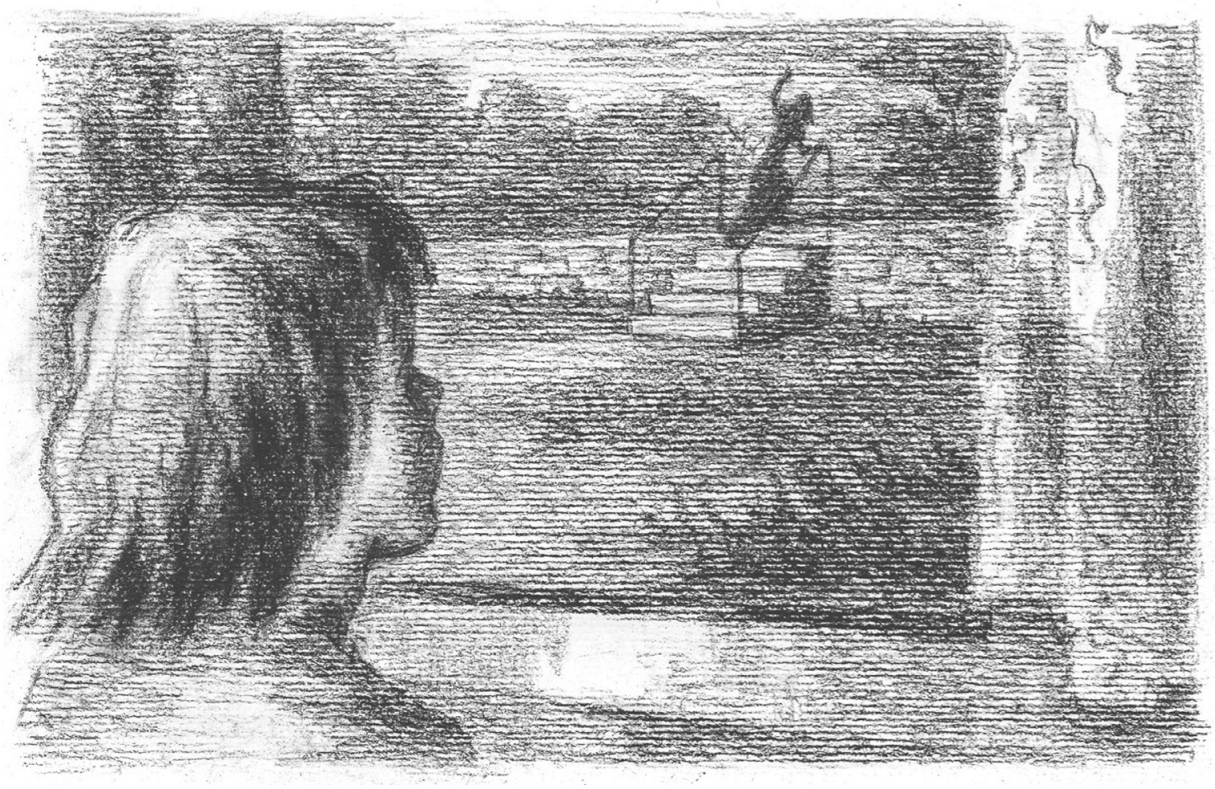
“Please,” Ellen said.

Still no answer.

Ellen and Ben went out of the bedroom into the big living-dining room. No one was there. But they were both sure they had heard someone open and close the screen door. The children looked around.

“That’s funny.” Ellen put the mushroom book on the big table. She went to look out of the kitchen window. It was getting dark outside. But Ellen could see someone skipping up the steps to the road.

It was a woman in a green sweater and a long brown skirt.



5

“Look, Ben.” Ellen stared through the window into the darkness.

Ben ran to the window and looked out. The woman was at the top of the steps now. She walked quickly away up the dirt road.

“That’s the woman we saw in the woods,” Ellen said. “What’s she doing here?”

“I told you she was a witch,” Ben said. “She came back to get the magic mushroom.”

Ellen looked at the drainboard. “It’s gone. Maybe it rolled onto the floor.” She bent down to look for it.

The screen door opened. Mr. and Mrs. Sanders came into the cottage.

“What are you looking for?” Mr. Sanders asked. “Did your frog get loose?”

“She’s right here,” Ben said. He looked into the pail. “No she isn’t!”

“Look behind the stone,” his father said.

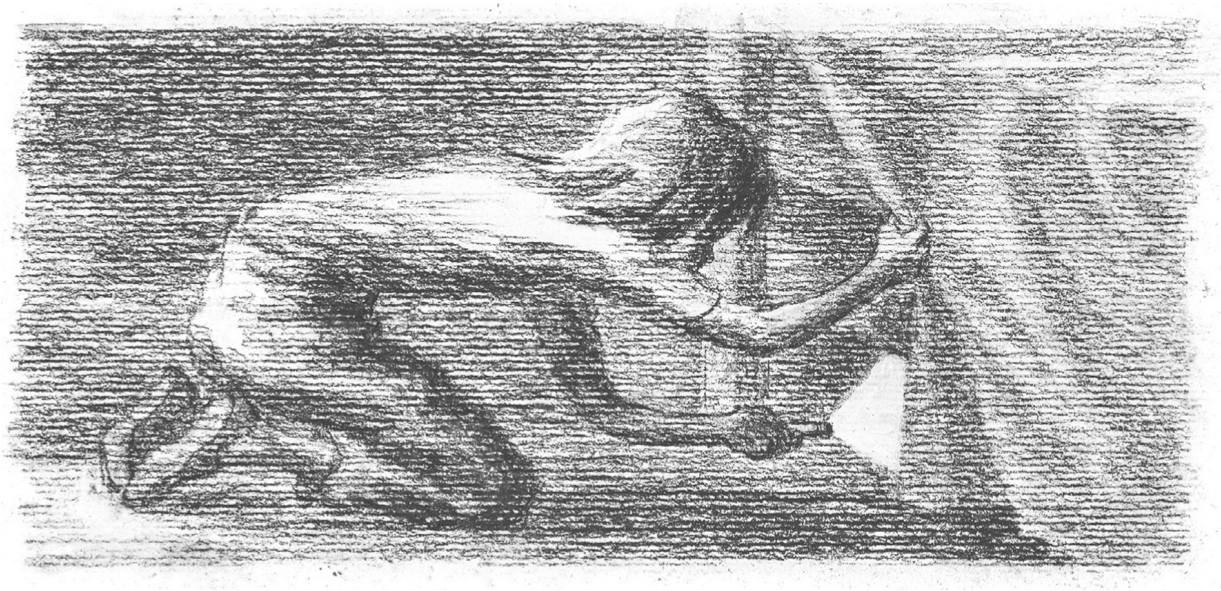
But the frog wasn’t there.

Ellen had been thinking. “The frog must have jumped onto the drainboard to eat the mushroom,” she said.

The whole family searched the cottage. Mrs. Sanders looked on the kitchen shelves and on top of all the dressers. Ellen looked under the two sofas in the living-dining room. She used her little red flashlight to see under the beds.

Ben checked behind the hot water heater in the kitchen and in back of the toilet in the bathroom. Mr. Sanders shook all the shoes and slippers that were on the floor. And everybody looked in the shower.

There wasn't a sign of the frog anywhere.



"I told you wild things like to be outdoors," Mrs. Sanders said. "The frog went back where it belongs."

"Ellen," Ben whispered, "you know what I think?"

"What?" Ellen asked him.

"The witch came back for her mushroom. And she took the frog, too," Ben said.

Mrs. Sanders picked up the big book from the dining table. "What were you doing with my mushroom book?"

"I was trying to find a picture of a mushroom we saw today," Ellen said.

Mrs. Sanders handed her the book. "It's nearly bedtime. But you can look for the mushroom while Ben takes his shower."

When Ben had finished his shower and was all ready for bed, Ellen showed him two drawings in the book. They were on page 580. One was a side view of the puffball standing up on the points of the star.

"Spooky," Ben said. "It looks like an octopus."

The other drawing showed it all curled up like a crocus bulb.

"That's just the way we first saw it," Ben said. "It's the same mushroom all right."

“It’s called an earthstar,” Ellen told him. “I tried to read about it. But the words were too hard.”

Mrs. Sanders walked over and took the book. “Your turn for a shower, Ellen. Off to bed, Ben.”

Ben woke Ellen very early in the morning. The birds were twittering outside. And it was just beginning to get light. Mr. and Mrs. Sanders were still asleep.

"Don't waste the day in bed," Ben whispered. "Come on down to the lake. Mom and Dad won't be up for hours."

Ellen slid out from under the covers. "Br-r-r! It's cold." She put on a shirt and jeans and pulled on a warm sweater. She saw that Ben was wearing his new rubber clogs.

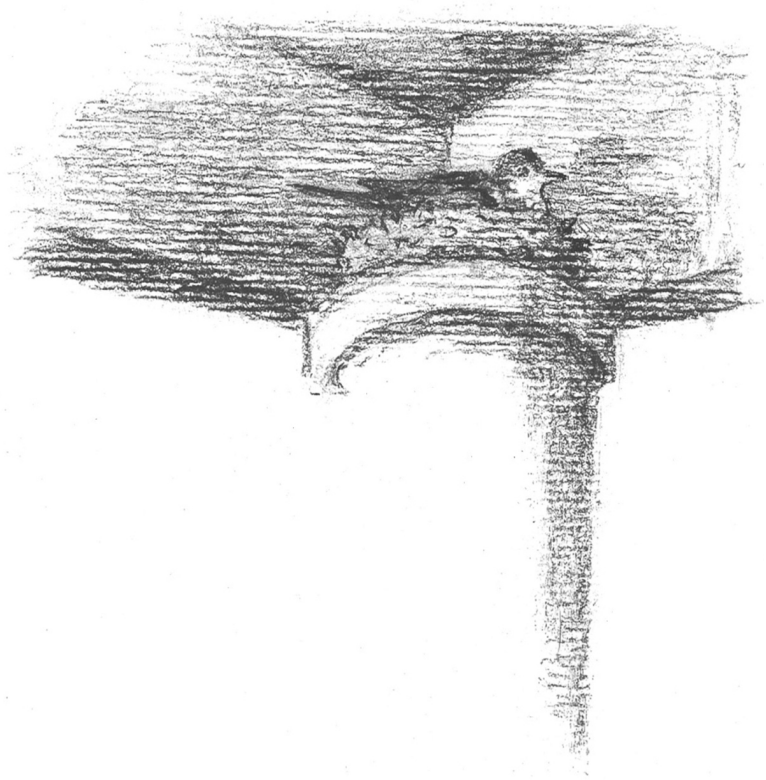
"My sneakers are still wet," he said.

Ellen decided to wear clogs, too.

They unhooked the screen door and went out onto the porch. Ellen was careful not to let the door bang behind them.

"Ben," she whispered. "The phoebes are back again this year."

Ben looked at the top of the pole in the corner of the porch. A fluffy brown bird was sitting on a nest there.



“I wonder how those frog’s eggs are doing,” Ben said.

The people in the other cottages seemed to like to sleep late. Ben and Ellen didn’t see anybody on the dirt road. And there was no one on the tree-covered hill going down to the lake.

They walked down a path till they came to the narrow beach. The lake was covered with a thick white mist. Through the mist Ben and Ellen could see a man fishing from the dock next to theirs.

Ellen went over to a green canoe on the beach. It was lying upside down on two sawhorses.

“Where are the paddles, Ben?”

Ben ran out to the end of the dock that belonged to cottage number eight. He looked into a motorboat that was tied to the dock. “Dad keeps them in the boat.” Ben pulled two long paddles out from under the back seat. He found two orange life jackets tucked into a shelf in the side of the boat. “The Lake Patrol will stop us if we don’t wear these.”

Ben and Ellen strapped on the life jackets and put the canoe into the water. Ben climbed into the front of the canoe. Ellen got into the back so she could steer. She used her paddle to shove the canoe out into deep water.

The two children felt like Indians as they paddled through the mist. Trees hid the cottages. The parking lot was around a bend of the lake.

They paddled steadily for a while. The sun rose over the treetops. The mist broke up into little wisps and puffs and was gone. The lake sparkled.

Ben looked over the side of the canoe. “There’s a whopper of a fish down there. The big ones come out early in the morning. Why don’t we head over to Shuman Point? I’ll bet we’d see a lot of fish there.”

Ellen turned the canoe and began to paddle toward a long point of land that stuck out into the lake. No cottages were built there. It was all woods.

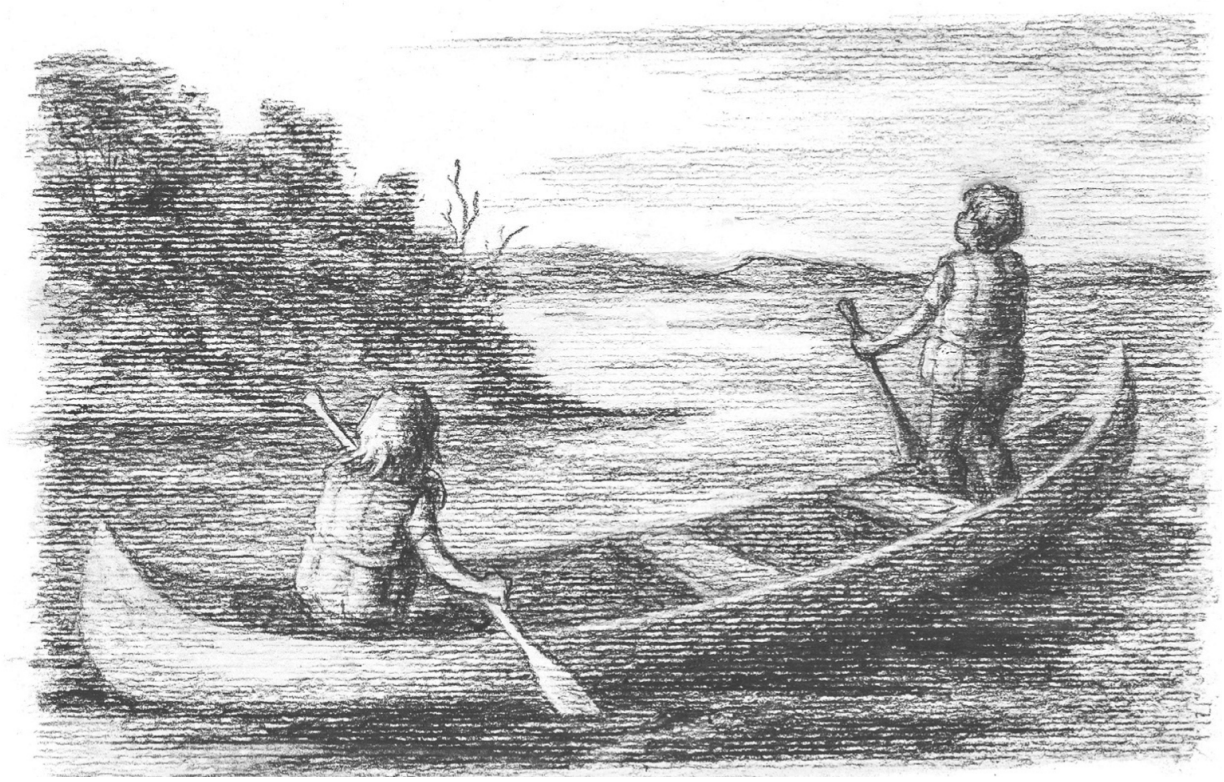
Ben pointed to a place on the rocky shore. A deer with two short horns had come out of the woods there to drink from the lake. He raised his head and sniffed the air. Then he flapped his white tail and crashed back into the woods.

“That was a buck,” Ben said. “I guess we scared him.”

Ellen looked into the woods after the deer. The trees grew on a steep rocky slope. “Ben, I think I see a cave.”

7

"A cave? Where?" Ben was so excited that he stood up in the canoe. It tipped to one side. He sat down and held on to both sides until the canoe stopped rocking.



"Take it easy!" Ellen said. She pointed to the top of the hill. "Can you see that dark place in the rocks up there?" She paddled close to the shore.

Ben tried to look through the trees. "Let's go up there and see if there really is a cave."

When they were in shallow water, Ben and Ellen stepped out of the canoe. They carried it up onto the shore and hid it behind some

rocks.

They left their life jackets in the canoe with the paddles and started up the rocky slope.

It was hard to climb in the rubber clogs. Their feet kept sliding out of the back of them. One of Ben's clogs rolled most of the way down the hill. He had to go after it.

"Let's go barefoot." Ellen jammed her clogs into the back pockets of her jeans.

Ben tucked his clogs under his belt.

"Watch out for poison ivy," Ellen said.

They zigzagged up the hill, going from one rock to the next. The trees seemed to grow right out of the rocks.

When they were close to the top of the hill, they walked along a ridge. Ben saw a shadowy place under an overhanging rock. "Is that what you saw?"

Ellen nodded.

It was tricky climbing the rock. Ellen had to use both hands. She pulled herself up onto a ledge in front of the cave. Then she lay down on her stomach and grabbed Ben's hands to help him up.

They stepped into the cave. It was dark inside, but after a few minutes their eyes began to get used to it.

The cave was bigger than it looked from outside. Ellen and Ben walked through a tunnel that went back into the hill. It widened out into something like a room.

Ben grabbed Ellen's arm.

In the dim light they saw somebody lying near them on the floor of the cave. It looked like a woman.

"Do you think she's dead?" Ben said.

The woman stirred. She let out a snore.

"She's only asleep," Ellen whispered. "Let's get out of here."

The two children turned to run out of the cave. But they were too late. A bony hand grabbed hold of Ellen's ankle. "Who's there?" a raspy voice asked.

Ellen felt as if she were frozen. She couldn't move. She couldn't speak.

The woman sat up. She let go of Ellen's ankle and started to feel around in the dim light for something. The next minute she struck a match and lit a bit of candle that was stuck to the floor of the cave.

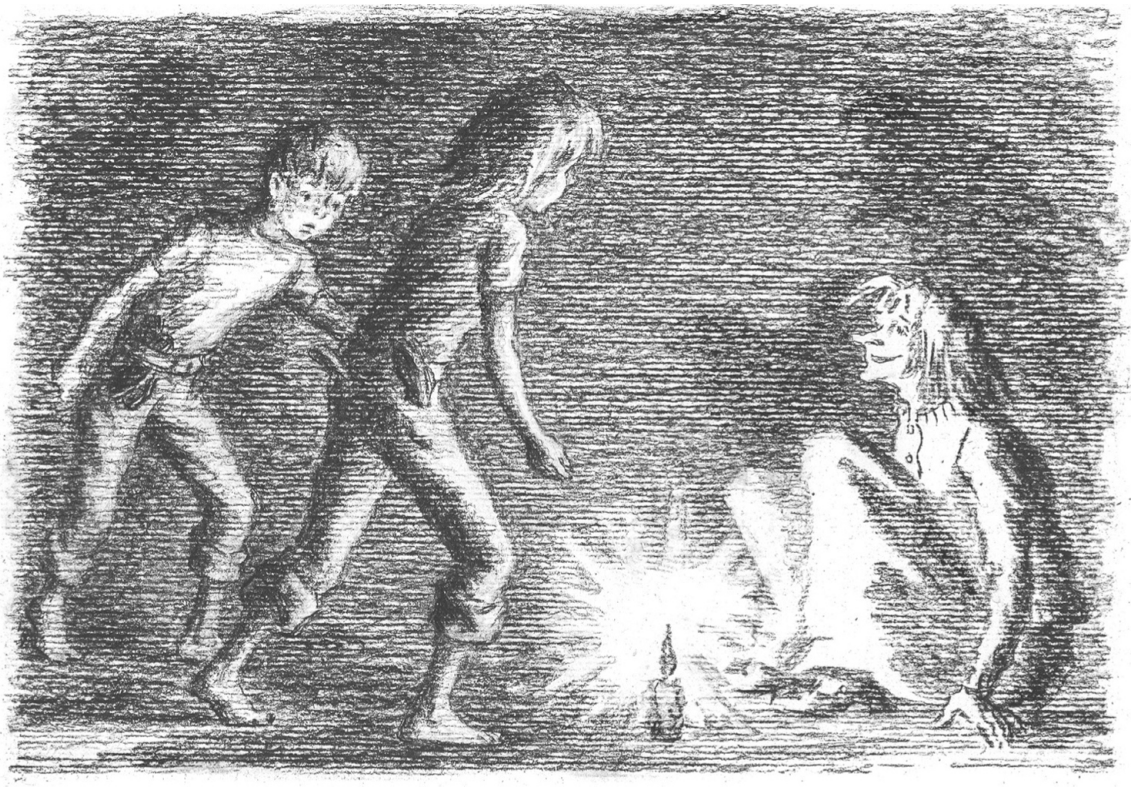
Now Ben and Ellen could see that she was wearing a green sweater and a brown skirt.

Ellen shivered. Her ankle still felt cold from the touch of the woman's hand. She looked at the woman's face. Her nose was long and pointed. And so was her chin. She brushed her scraggly gray hair back and looked at Ellen with bright green eyes.

Ellen's heart seemed to stop beating.

"Good morning," the woman said. "You're up early."

She's pretending to be friendly, Ellen thought. We'd better act as if we believe her.



“We saw you in the woods yesterday,” Ben said.

“Yes.” The woman stood up and stretched. “You’re Ben. And that’s your sister, Ellen.”

“How do you know our names?” Ben asked. “You must be a witch!”

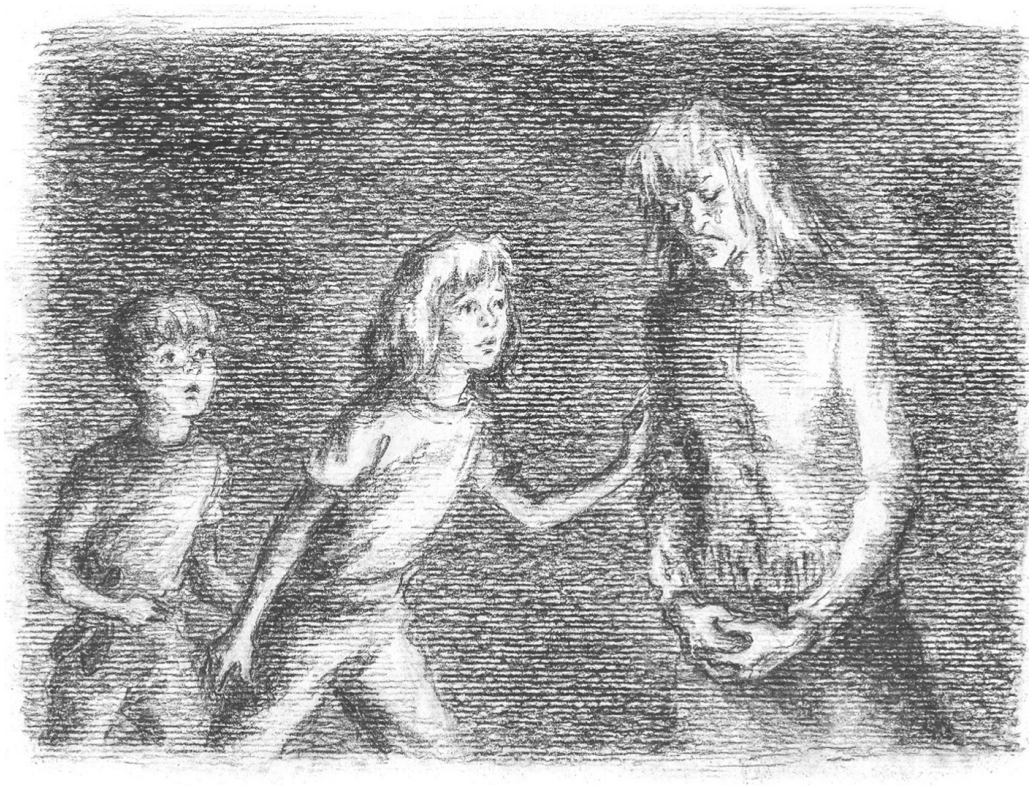
Why did Ben always say such terrible things? Ellen wished she could shove the words back into his mouth. “Be careful, Ben!” she said in a low voice.

Ben stared at the woman. She was blinking her green eyes. And her face was starting to get red. The corners of her mouth began to turn down.

“Oh, Ellen, she’s going to do something awful to us!” Ben tried to pull Ellen toward the mouth of the cave.

But Ellen didn’t move. She was still looking at the woman’s face.

Ben was frantic. “Run!” he said.



Ellen thought she saw something shiny on the woman's wrinkled cheek. A moment later a fat tear rolled down.

All of a sudden everything seemed different. Ellen wasn't afraid anymore.

"Stop it, Ben!" she said. "You've hurt her feelings." She yanked her hand away from Ben and gently touched the woman's arm. "Don't cry," Ellen said. "Ben didn't mean it. Of course you're not a witch."

The woman looked at Ellen with wet green eyes. "That's just the trouble."

"What do you mean?" Ellen asked.

The woman sniffed. She swallowed hard. “If you must know,” she said in a very small voice, “they took my hat and broom away last Friday night.”

Ben jabbed Ellen in the ribs. “What did I tell you?”

“Sh-sh!” Ellen said.

The woman was still talking. “I could do without that stupid broom. It never flew very well. My ankles were banged every time I went over a fence. But, oh dear! It was a *lovely* hat.” Two tears trickled down her pointed nose.

“What’s your name?” Ellen asked. “You know ours.”

“Gertrude,” the woman said. “I’ve never liked it. Some people call me Gert. But I don’t really like that, either.”

Ellen thought for a minute. “Would you like it if we called you *Trudy*?” she asked.

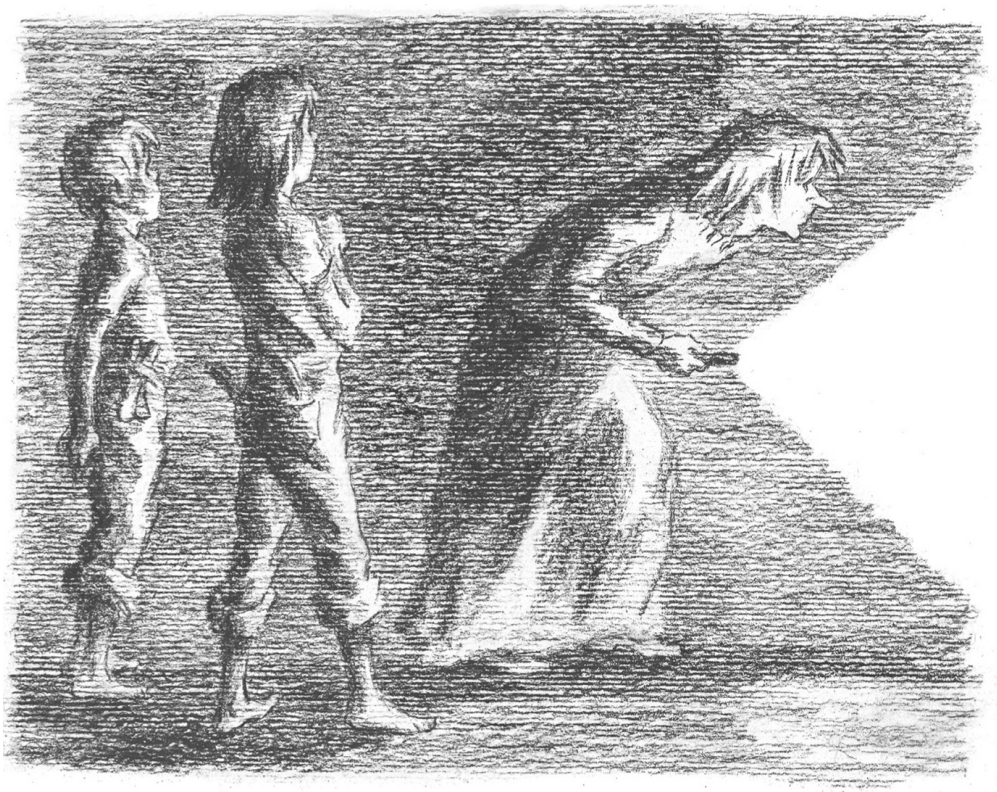
The woman looked at Ellen. Suddenly her face cracked into a smile. “Why didn’t anybody ever think of that before?” She gave three little jumps in the air. “Trudy, Trudy, what a lovely name!”

The candle was flickering. Ellen saw something on the ground right beside the candle. It was the earthstar! Ellen picked it up. A second later the candle sputtered and went out.

“I wish I had my flashlight,” Ellen said.

She felt something heavy in the side pocket of her jeans. Ellen pulled out her little red flashlight. “I must have put it in my pocket after I finished looking for the frog last night,” Ellen told herself.

She clicked on the flashlight.



“Lend that to me for a minute, Ellen,” Trudy said.

Trudy shone the flashlight all over the cave. She bent over and poked her sharp nose into every crack in the rocks. “Oh dear! Oh dear! Whatever did I do with it? Next thing I’ll be losing my head!”

“Is this what you’re looking for?” Ellen held up the earthstar. “You were jumping around so much I was afraid you’d step on it.”

“Yes, yes. That’s my darling.” Trudy gave Ellen her flashlight and took the little brown star. She held it on the palm of her hand. “Now, don’t go running away again,” she said to the mushroom. “I never seem to be able to keep track of you.”

Ben poked Ellen. “I told you she took it last night,” he said in a whisper.

“What’s it good for?” Ellen asked Trudy. “Why do you want it so much?”

“I don’t know,” Trudy said. “But I just love it. When I was a child my mother had one. She would never let me touch it. Mother said

earthstars were dangerous." Trudy frowned. "Yesterday this one changed me into a frog."

Ellen looked at her. "Is that why we didn't see you on the cliff?"

"That was dangerous all right," Ben said. "If I hadn't taken you home with me, you might have been eaten by a bird." He scratched his head. "And of course you know our names. You spent all that time with us yesterday."

"And now we know why we couldn't find the frog last night," Ellen said. "How did you get changed back to yourself again, Trudy?"

"The earthstar did it." Trudy slipped the star into the pocket of her green sweater. "I wish we could be friends," she said to Ellen and Ben. "I get lonesome all by myself here in the country."

"Where do you come from?" Ellen asked her.

"Brooklyn," Trudy said. "But the Head Witch there expelled me from the coven."

"Why?" Ben asked.

For a minute Trudy didn't answer. She looked at the ground. "Lately I forget things," she said in a sad voice. "And my magic never did work well. Some of the other witches aren't very good, either. But the Head Witch told me I was the worst she'd ever heard of. She said she wasn't going to let a good hat and broom go to waste any longer."

Bong! Bong! Bong!

Ellen ran down the passage to the mouth of the cave. She looked through the trees on the hill outside.

Ben and Trudy came after her.

"Ben, that's our motorboat out there! Mother and Daddy are looking for us. They brought along the gong." Ellen turned to Trudy. "Good-bye. We have to go now."

Trudy helped them over the ledge in front of the cave. Ben and Ellen climbed down the hill as fast as they could. They put the canoe into the water and paddled out into the middle of the lake.

Mr. Sanders was angry. “Don’t ever go anywhere again without telling us. It’s lucky our neighbor saw you two go out in the canoe or we wouldn’t have known what happened to you.”

Mrs. Sanders tied one end of a rope to the back of the motorboat. The other end was tied to the canoe. “I’m glad you had the sense to take the life jackets,” she said.

Ellen sat down on the back seat of the boat. “I’m sorry you and Daddy were worried, Mother.”

“We didn’t want to wake you, Mom,” Ben said. “You always like to sleep late when we’re in the country.”

The motorboat rumbled down the lake, towing the canoe behind it. The motor made too much noise for anyone to talk. Ellen liked the canoe because it was quiet. But the motorboat was much faster. Very soon they reached their dock.

Ben and Ellen jumped out and tied up the boat. Mr. Sanders put the canoe back on the sawhorses.

They all went up the hill to the cottage for breakfast. Mr. Sanders mixed up a batch of pancakes. Mrs. Sanders fried bacon and made cocoa.

Both Ellen and Ben were very hungry. Halfway through her third pancake, Ellen put down her fork. “Ben, what do you suppose Trudy eats? I didn’t see any food in that cave.”

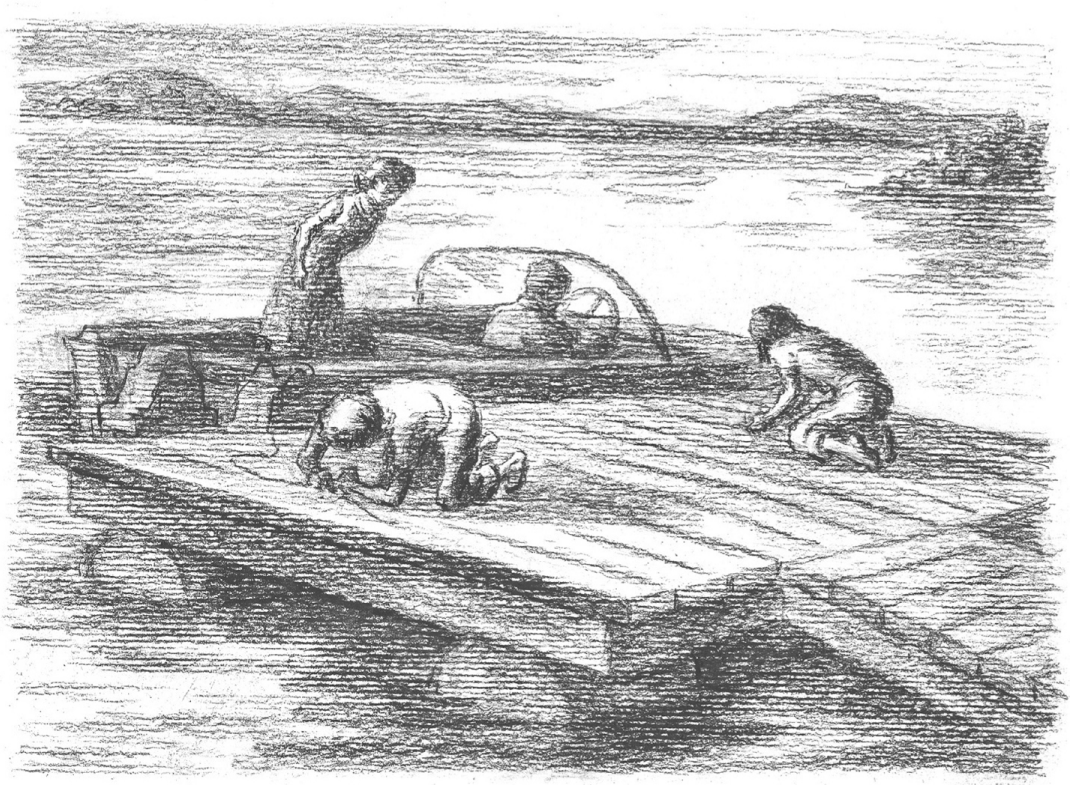
Ben thought a minute. “Toads, I guess.”

Ellen couldn’t eat any more of her pancake.

Ben finished his. Then he jumped up and ran to look out of the big picture window. “Those birds sure are busy.”

Ellen left the table and came to see what was going on.

Two brown birds were flying back and forth to the nest on top of the pole. There was no mother bird sitting there now. But four little beaks were sticking up out of the nest. The eggs had hatched.



“I wonder how those frog’s eggs are doing,” Ben said.

Mr. and Mrs. Sanders came to the window. They watched the birds for a while. Then Mrs. Sanders said, “I’m going to Hawley for groceries. There’s a bazaar and rummage sale today at the Methodist church. I’d like to go to it.”

Last year Ellen had bought an old book about water babies for ten cents at a Hawley rummage sale. “Oh, Mother,” she said, “may I go with you?”

“Why don’t you both run along right now?” Mr. Sanders said. “I don’t much care for rummage sales. Ben and I can wash the dishes and burn the trash while you’re gone.”

11

Ellen and her mother drove five miles to the little town of Hawley. They stopped at the News and Novelty Shop to buy a *New York Times*.

"Oh, Mother, aren't they pretty!" Ellen pointed to a pot of pink and white petunias in front of the store.

Mrs. Sanders smiled. "There are even more flowers on Main Avenue than last year. Look at the windowboxes on the bank."

The library was open. Mrs. Sanders took out a book. "Why don't you take one out, too?" she asked Ellen.

"I'm going to buy a book at the rummage sale," Ellen said.

Next they went to the supermarket. Mrs. Sanders bought four big bags of groceries. Ellen helped her load them into the station wagon. Then they drove to the Methodist church.

Some people stood outside on the church steps and talked to each other.

Inside there were two rooms with tables of things for sale. Mrs. Sanders went to the table with the biggest crowd around it. She bought a loaf of homemade banana-nut bread and a jar of watermelon pickles.

Ellen started to walk toward the table where there were books for sale. On the way she passed a rack of old clothes. On top of the rack was a pointed hat with a wide brim. Ellen stopped to look at it.

The woman in charge of the old clothes smiled at her. “That’s part of a costume I wore in a play,” she said. “I made it myself.” She put the hat on her head and made a fierce face. “How do I look?” The woman laughed. “That’s the way I looked in the play.”

Ellen touched the hat. It was made of shiny black oilcloth glued onto cardboard.

“It’s very strong,” the woman said. “I wore it for a rainhat once. If you want it, I’ll sell it to you for a quarter.”

Ellen felt the hat again. She only had a quarter. “I really want to buy a book,” she said.

She went to look at the books. There was a dog-eared copy of *The Cuckoo Clock* on sale for a quarter. Ellen loved the pictures in it, but she had already read the book. There were some great paperbacks, too, that Ellen hadn’t read. They only cost a nickel.

But Ellen kept thinking about the pointed hat.

At last she went back to the old clothes stand. She took out her quarter and handed it to the woman there.

“Please, may I have the witch’s hat,” Ellen said.

12

"I thought you were going to buy a book." Mrs. Sanders put the banana-nut bread and the watermelon pickles in the back of the station wagon.

"I changed my mind," Ellen said. "It's such a nice hat." Ellen sat on the front seat and held the hat on her lap. "The lady who sold it to me said she wore it in a play."

Mrs. Sanders took a good look at the hat. She started the car. "I think I saw that play last summer at the Ritz Theater here in Hawley."

When they got back to the cottage, the breakfast dishes were all washed and put away. Ben and Mr. Sanders were down at the lake. Mrs. Sanders went into the kitchen to unpack the groceries. Ellen took the pointed hat into her room and laid it on her bed. She changed into her bathing suit.

"Are you going swimming?" Ellen asked her mother.

"I'll go later," Mrs. Sanders said. "Don't wait for me. I want to get a casserole into the oven."

Ellen put on her rubber clogs and ran down the hill to the dock. Mr. Sanders was sitting in the boat, trying to finish the crossword puzzle in yesterday's newspaper. Ben was lying on his stomach across the front of the boat. He was looking down into the water. "There are a lot of minnows down there," he told Ellen.

Ellen looked at the shiny little fish darting among the rocks on the lake bottom. Then she kicked off her clogs and dived into the water. She started to swim to a dock that was anchored in the middle of the lake. Ben jumped in and swam after her.

The water was just cool enough to feel good. Ellen rolled over onto her back and looked up at the blue sky. Swimming always seemed like flying.

Ben caught up with her. “Race you to the ski dock,” he said.

Ellen would rather have drifted along in the clear water. But she didn’t want Ben to think he could swim faster than she could. She rolled back onto her stomach and swam toward the dock.

They reached the dock at the same time. Ben climbed up a wooden ladder and lay down in the warm sunshine on the dock. Ellen came up after him. She brushed her dripping hair out of her eyes.

“I bought a hat for Trudy.” Ellen sat down beside Ben. “It looks just like a real witch’s hat. Maybe it’ll cheer her up.”

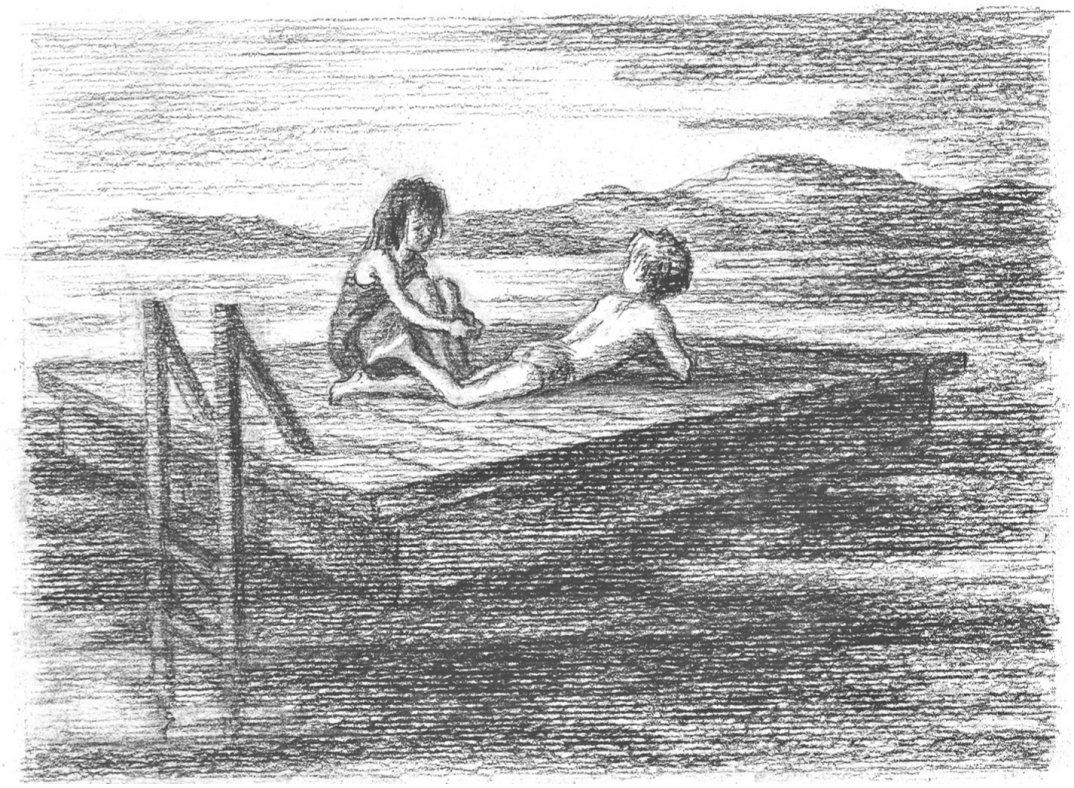
Ben sat up. “Did you believe that crazy story she told us?”

“Of course,” Ellen said. “She’s much too nice to be any good as a witch.”

“That’s what she wants us to think,” Ben said. “You can’t trust witches.”

“You don’t have to come with me if you’re afraid,” Ellen said. “But I’m going to take the hat over to her after lunch.”

“Who’s afraid? I just said I didn’t trust her.” Ben grinned. “Anyway, we never really explored that cave.”



“Maybe we ought to take Trudy some lunch,” Ellen said. “Only I don’t know what she eats.”

“Why do you worry about her so much?” Ben asked. “She looks old enough to take care of herself. I was more worried about her when she was a frog.”

“Ben, if Trudy knew how to take care of herself she never would have been turned into a frog,” Ellen told him. “She said the earthstar did it to her. No wonder her mother wouldn’t let her play with them.”

Ben thought about this. “Maybe you’re right.” He stood up. “Now we’d better take care of ourselves and get out of the sun. Remember that awful sunburn I got last year?” Ben dived into the water. “Race you back to the boat, Ellen.”

13

"I thought you two had enough canoeing this morning." Mrs. Sanders looked up from her library book. "Well, be sure you keep those life jackets on."

It was after lunch. Mr. and Mrs. Sanders were sitting in the motorboat, which was tied to the dock. Mr. Sanders was working on the crossword puzzle in the morning newspaper.

Ellen and Ben were still in their bathing suits. Ellen was wearing the pointed hat. It had black shoelaces sewn to it. She tied them under her chin so the hat wouldn't fall off.

Ben and Ellen put the canoe into the water and paddled away down the lake. When they reached Shuman Point, they beached the canoe. They left their clogs and life jackets in it and started up the hill to the cave. Ellen carried her little red flashlight in her hand.

They crawled up onto the rocky ledge and walked into the cave. Ellen shone her flashlight on the rough rock walls.

The walls were carved all over. People had scratched their names into the rock. Someone had written *June loves Bruce* with yellow spray paint all down one side of the tunnel.

"I guess it's not such a secret cave after all," Ben said.

They walked to the room where they had found Trudy. Ellen shone the flashlight all around. The floor was littered with acorn shells, but Trudy was not there. And there was no sign of the earthstar.

"I told you we couldn't trust her," Ben said. "The minute we left her she cleared out. Witches don't want anybody to know where they live. She's gone to make trouble somewhere."

"She can't be far away," Ellen said. "She doesn't have a broom to fly on."

"That's her story," Ben said. "But maybe she hid her hat and broom before she went to sleep. How did she get here in the first place without a broom? We forgot to ask her that."

They went out of the cave and climbed to the very top of the hill.

"Trudy! Trudy!" Ellen called.

The only answer was an echo, "Trudy! Trudy!" from the huge rocks on the other side of the lake.

"Come on, Ellen," Ben said. "I wish we'd never met that witch. Let's go back to the pool on the cliff and look at the frog's eggs."

They climbed down the hill to where they had left the canoe. Ellen kept the hat on her head while they were paddling home. She was afraid it would get wet if she put it in the canoe. And she wasn't sure how waterproof it was, even though the lady said she'd used it as a rainhat.

When they got back to the cottage, Ellen and Ben changed out of their bathing suits. Ellen took off the hat and left it on her bed. It wasn't comfortable to wear. The shoelaces cut into her chin. Ellen was sorry now that she hadn't bought a book.

Ben's sneakers were still soggy. He put them on anyway. "Clogs aren't the best things to wear in the woods," he said. He pulled on a bright blue T-shirt.

Mrs. Sanders had come up from the dock to get her sunglasses. "Where are you off to now?" she asked.

"We're going to look at the frog's eggs in the rock pool on the cliff." Ellen followed Ben out of the cottage and up the path to the dirt road.

They took the shortcut over the hill. It was hot and sticky in the woods now. Ellen heard a buzzing noise near her ear. She slapped at it. "We should have put on some of that stuff that keeps bugs away."

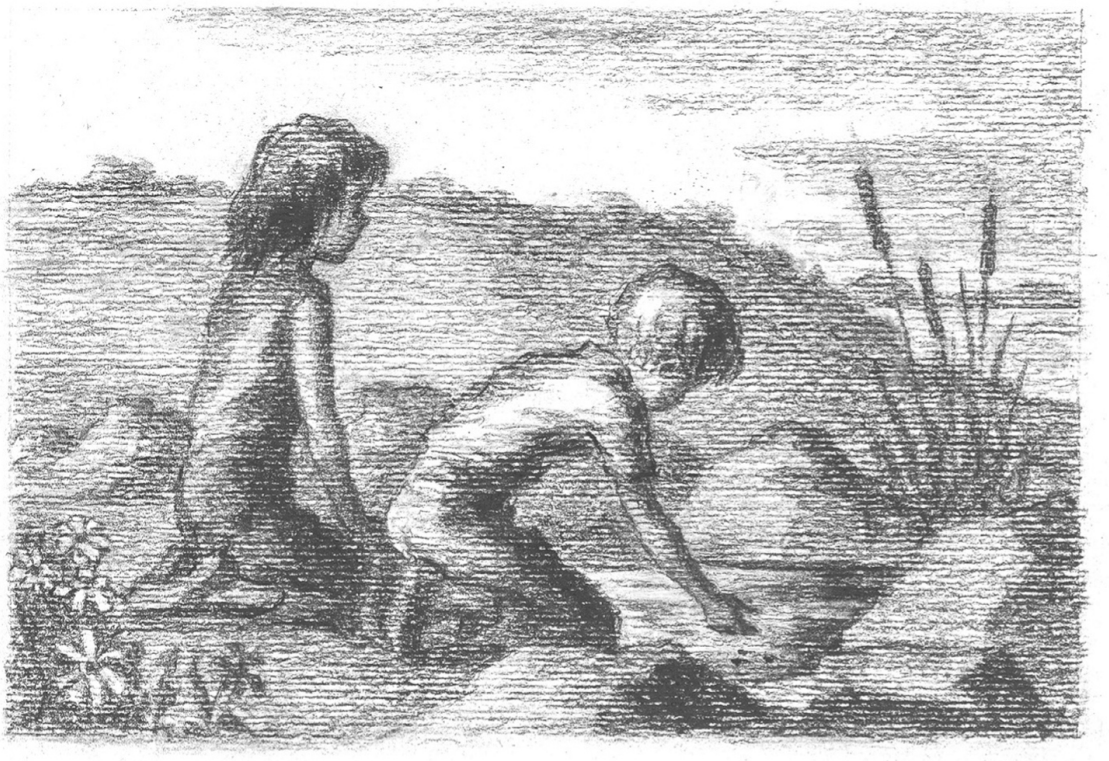
Going down the cliff, Ben stopped to pick raspberries. "These are better than the ones I found yesterday."

Ellen sat down to dump the sand and pebbles out of her sneakers. Then she followed the old truck trail around the hill. She jumped over the little stream and started up the slope again.

When she came to the little pool, she bent over to look at the frog's eggs. "They're gone, Ben!"

14

Ben kneeled on the rocks beside the water. He looked into the pool. “What are those little black beans?” Ben reached into the water and tried to grab one. It wiggled away. “Hey, Ellen, this bean has a tail! It’s a tadpole.”



Ellen got down on her knees, too. She stared into the water. “There are a lot of tadpoles hiding between the stones at the bottom.”

Ellen pointed to something floating on top of the pool. “Ben, isn’t that the earthstar?”

“It sure looks like it,” Ben said. “But what’s that funny bug on it?”

Ellen squinted to see better in the bright sunlight. Now she saw a tiny woman in a green sweater and a long brown skirt. She was asleep on the white puffball in the center of the star.

“It’s Trudy!” Ellen said.

The star had been flat on the water a moment ago. Now, so slowly they could hardly tell what was happening, the brown points were turning down. The star began to sink.

“She’s going to drown,” Ben said.

Ellen snatched up the earthstar. She held it on the palm of her hand. It stood on its points.

“Looks just like an octopus,” Ben said.

“Trudy,” Ellen said, “wake up!”

The tiny woman sat up and stretched. She looked up into Ellen’s face and seemed to be talking.

“What’s she saying?” Ben asked.

“I can’t hear her.” Ellen lifted the earthstar to her ear. Trudy stood on tiptoe and shouted. But all Ellen could hear was a buzzing like a mosquito.

“Oh, I wish we could talk to each other,” Ellen said.

Then she heard Trudy say, “No need to shout.” She sat down on the puffball and crossed her legs. “I’m glad you finally noticed me.”

“What do you mean?” Ellen asked.

“I tried to talk to you when you were in the woods,” Trudy told her. “But you slapped at me and nearly killed me.”

“I’m sorry,” Ellen said. “I thought you were a mosquito.”

“Aren’t you going to thank us, Trudy?” Ben said. “We just saved you from drowning.”

Trudy peeked over the edge of the puffball at the points of the star. “Oh dear, I forgot that earthstars go wild when they’re wet. This one was all curled up like a nice little basket when I landed on the pool.”

“You mean that thing *flies*?” Ben said.

“It did when it was dry,” Trudy told him.

Ellen held the star up to take a good look at it. “Do earthstars always fly?”

“I suppose so,” Trudy said. “They do all sorts of magic. But this one only works when it wants to. And I never know what it’s going to do next.”

“How did you get to be so small?” Ben asked.

“The earthstar did it,” Trudy said.

“Will it make you your right size again?” Ellen wanted to know.

“I hope so,” Trudy said. “But for some reason it doesn’t seem to want to.”

The mushroom was drying out in the sun. The points of the star began to lie flat on the palm of Ellen’s hand.

Ben looked at it. “Hey, wouldn’t it be fun if it was big enough for us to fly on it? Trudy, see if you can work some magic.”

Trudy stroked the puffball. “Earthstar,” she said, “won’t you please take my friends for a ride?”

Nothing happened except that the points dried out a bit more. They started to curl.

“You see,” Trudy said, “there’s no telling what it will do.”

“Oh, I wish Ben and I could fly with you, Trudy,” Ellen said.

The earthstar flipped its points like the flaps of an airplane. It sailed off Ellen’s hand and landed beside the pool. Then it seemed to get bigger and bigger. So did Trudy. In almost no time she looked as big as she ever had been.

Ben and Ellen were still on their knees watching the star. Now they saw that everything around them was different.

They were near a small clear lake that was rimmed all around by strange bare hills.

Ben jumped to his feet and went over to the lake. “Ellen, look at these funny fat sharks!”

Ellen stood up. She ran over to see. “They look like giant tadpoles,” she said.

15

Suddenly they both knew what had happened. Ellen looked at Ben. “The earthstar and Trudy didn’t get bigger.”

“No,” he said. “We got smaller.” Ben thought for a minute. “How are we going to get big again, Ellen?”

Even Trudy didn’t know how to make herself big. She wouldn’t be able to help Ben and Ellen. Ellen was scared, but she didn’t want Ben to know it.

Trudy was calling, “Come on. I thought you wanted to go for a ride.”

“Now’s our chance, Ben. This ought to be fun.” Ellen ran over to the earthstar.

The points of the star were starting to curve up around the puffball. Ellen squeezed between two points and climbed up beside Trudy.

Ben was right behind her. Now that he was on the earthstar he was so excited he forgot everything else. “Show me how you make it fly, Trudy.”

“Watch.” Trudy took hold of the tip of one point. She pulled it toward her. At once the earthstar flew up into the air. When Trudy moved the point to the right, the earthstar turned right. She pushed it the other way. The star turned left. “See?” Trudy said.

Ben nodded. “How do you land it?” he asked.

“Simple.” Trudy pushed the star point forward. The mushroom flew down. It landed at the foot of a raspberry bush.

Trudy looked up at the juicy red berries. “That reminds me,” she said. “I haven’t had lunch.”

“Do you eat *raspberries*?” Ben asked.

“Love them,” Trudy said.

“What else do you eat?” Ellen wanted to know.

“I had some nice acorns this morning. But what I like best are mushrooms. And sometimes they’re very hard to find.” She rubbed her pointed chin. “Come to think of it, I was looking for a mushroom when I found the earthstar.”

“Can you eat earthstars?” Ben asked.

“Yes, but it’s a terrible waste.” Trudy slipped off the puffball and wiggled between the points of the star. She jumped to the ground and started to climb the raspberry bush.

Ben watched her. “I guess you’re right, Ellen,” he whispered. “She sure doesn’t know how to take care of herself. Look at her now.”

The berries were a long way up. Trudy’s brown skirt kept catching on the branches. “Ouch!” she said.

“What’s the matter?” Ellen asked.

“I’m stuck on a thorn.” Trudy tried to free herself. “Oh dear!”

“Stay where you are.” Ben pulled one of the points of the earthstar back. The star began to rise in the air. Ben steered it between the branches of the raspberry bush over to where Trudy was caught on the thorn.

Ellen reached out and pulled the sharp thorn out of the back of Trudy’s long skirt.

“Get back on the earthstar, Trudy,” Ben said. “We’ll fly over to a berry.”

“Now why didn’t *I* think of that?” Trudy climbed back onto the puffball.

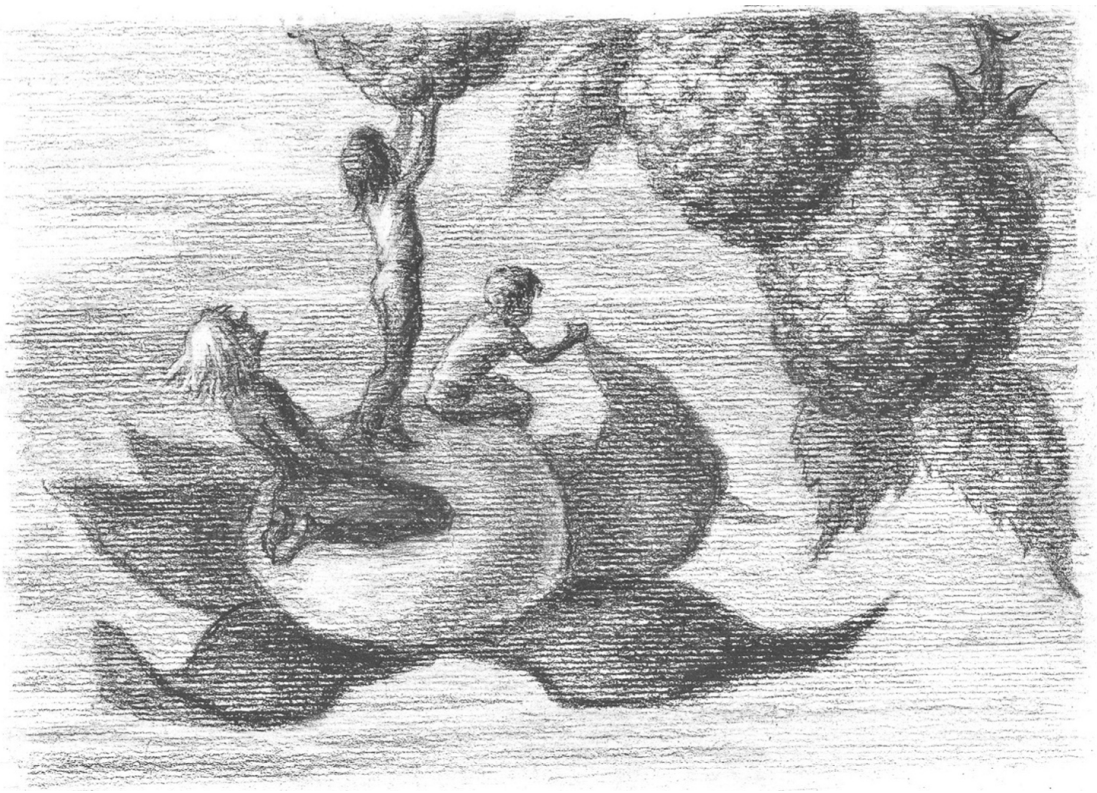
Ben flew the earthstar under a ripe raspberry. It was almost as big as the puffball. Ellen stood on tiptoe and reached up to break off a round shiny piece of the berry. It spurted juice. Ellen’s arms were splashed all the way to the elbow.

The bit of berry seemed as big as a basketball. Ellen handed it to Trudy. “Here you are.”

Trudy ate as if she were starved. Her cheeks were stained red. And her fingers dripped juice.

“I thought witches only ate toads,” Ben said.

“Not me,” Trudy told him. “I’m a vegetarian.”

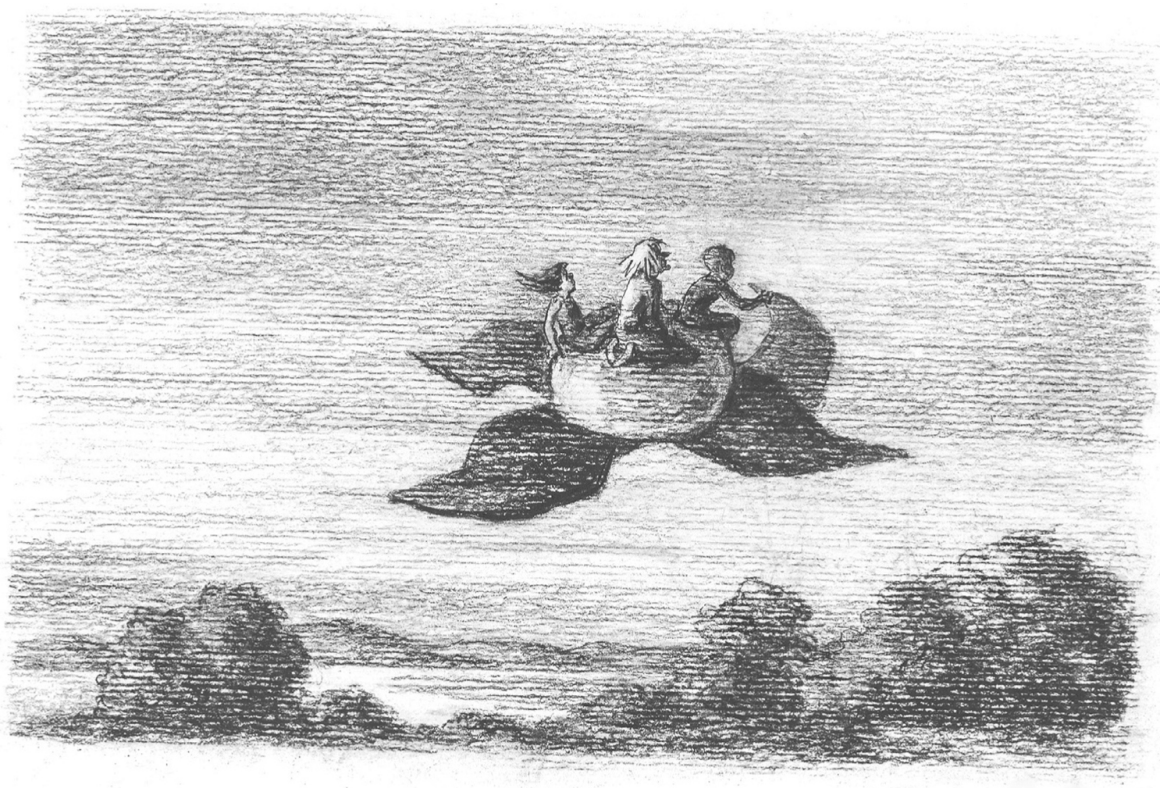


“You mean you don’t eat meat at all?” Ellen asked. “Is that why when you were a frog you wouldn’t eat the meat loaf?”

“Yes.” Trudy sucked the piece of berry. “Some people say that’s what’s the matter with my magic. But I can’t help it. I like to play with toads and frogs, so of course I can’t eat them.” She smiled. “Anyway, if I hadn’t been turned into a frog myself, I never would have met you two.”

She looked at Ellen and Ben. “I never really had such good friends before. I was lonely after the Head Witch expelled me from the coven. But I don’t mind it so much anymore. If the sun weren’t so hot on my head, I might not even miss my hat.”

16



Ellen remembered the hat. She was sorry now that she hadn't brought it with her. They could fly home and get it. But Ellen wanted the hat to be a surprise for Trudy.

"Trudy," Ellen said, "there are some baby birds in a nest on our porch. We can't see them without climbing up. And Mother says that would scare the parent birds. I don't think the birds would be scared of us if we're this small. And on the earthstar we could fly right up to the nest."

Ellen just wanted an excuse to fly back to the cottage so she could give Trudy the pointed hat. But Ben didn't know what she was up to.

He had always wanted to look into the nest.

"That's a great idea, Ellen!" Ben said. "How about it, Trudy?"

Trudy wiped her mouth on her sleeve. She dried her hands on the hem of her long brown skirt. "Let's go."

Ben pulled back a point. The earthstar zoomed up into the air. Ben steered it higher and higher. They flew to the top of the hill and over the trees to the other side. Then they cut across the road to the cottage. Ben steered the earthstar onto the porch and over to the pole in the corner. The star hovered just below the ceiling.

Ben and Ellen looked into the phoebes' nest. They saw four naked baby birds.

Their beaks were wide open. And they were chirping with hunger.

The mother bird flew to the nest. She didn't notice the earthstar. She stuffed an insect into the beak of the biggest baby bird and flew away.

The father bird flapped over and fed a second baby. Then he rushed off to catch another insect.

Back came the mother bird. She dropped a mosquito into the open beak of the third baby and flew away.

"The smallest bird hasn't had anything to eat yet," Ben said.

"It's his turn now," Ellen peeped between the curled-up points of the earthstar.

The father bird flew to the nest. The biggest baby bird was chirping loudly again. The father dropped a fly into his beak and turned to go.

Ben stood up and waved his arms. "Stupid!" he yelled. "You forgot to feed the little guy."

The father bird caught sight of Ben's bright blue T-shirt. He swooped down and pulled Ben off the earthstar.

"Put me down!" Ben screamed.

But the bird didn't seem to hear him. He seemed to think Ben was some sort of fly. He flew to the nest and dropped Ben into the open beak of the smallest bird.

17

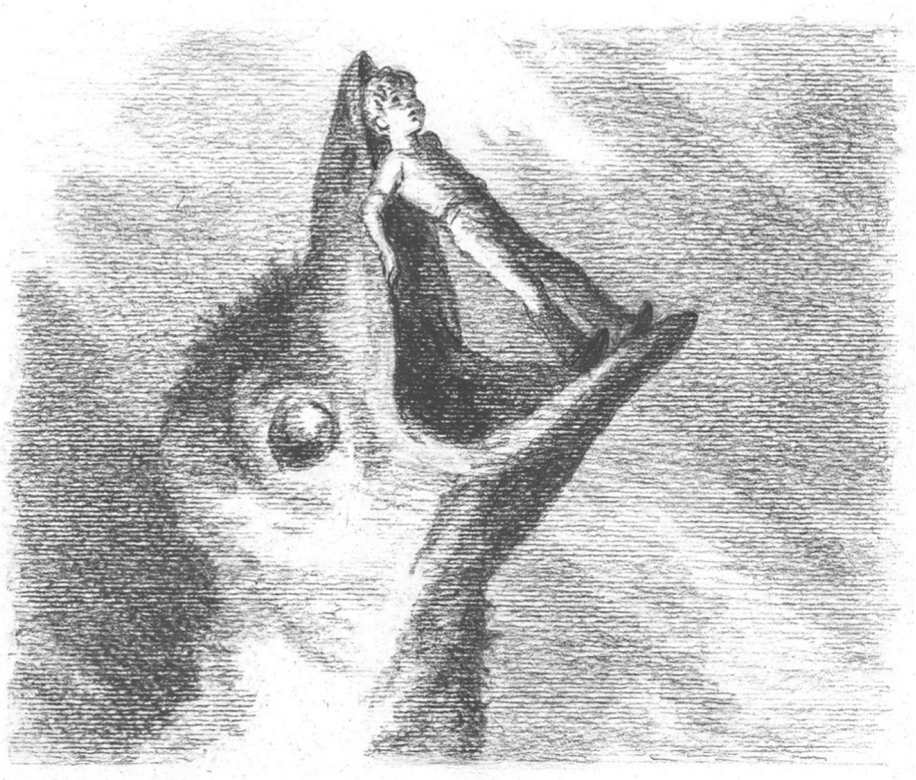
“Help! Ellen, *do* something!” Ben braced his feet against one side of the bird’s beak and pushed his head and shoulders against the other side. If he could keep the beak propped open, the bird might not be able to swallow.

Ellen didn’t stop to think. She stood up and made a flying leap off the earthstar.

She landed on the bare neck of the little bird and started to slide down.

One tiny pin feather was just poking through the skin. Ellen grabbed hold of it. With her other hand she tickled the throat of the bird.

The little bird coughed. Ben came flying out of the beak like a rocket. He shot up into the air and then fell onto the twigs at the edge of the nest.



“Ow!” Ben howled. “This is just like landing on a woodpile.”

Ellen let go of the pin feather. She slid down the neck of the baby bird and hid under its wing. She peeked out and saw the mother bird flying toward the nest.

“Ben,” Ellen screamed, “take off that blue shirt!”

Ben pulled off his T-shirt and rolled it into a little ball. He sat on it. Then he leaned as close to the twigs as he could and tried to look like part of the nest.

The mother bird came flapping over. She didn’t notice either Ben or Ellen.

The smallest bird gave another cough. It cleared its throat. The mother bird shoved a fat mosquito into its open beak and flew away.

As soon as the mother bird had gone, Trudy drove the earthstar right up against the nest. “All aboard!” she yelled.

Ben and Ellen jumped onto the puffball. Trudy started to back up the earthstar.

“Wait a minute!” Ben reached between two points of the star and grabbed his blue shirt off the twigs.

Trudy guided the earthstar down to the floor of the porch. She landed in front of the screen door.

16

The points of the dry earthstar curled over the puffball. Ben, Ellen, and Trudy were hidden from the birds.

Ellen felt as if she were wound up tight like a spring. Little by little she began to unwind. She peeked out of a crack between star points. “There’s something in the house I want to show Trudy,” Ellen said. “But we have to get the door open first.”

Ben looked at the screen door. “The three of us ought to be able to do it.” He slipped out of a space between points of the earthstar. Trudy and Ellen came out after him.

Ben grabbed the bottom corner of the door. He yanked at it until Trudy could get her foot into the crack. She spread her arms and legs apart to make the crack as wide as she could.

First Ellen and then Ben wiggled through. Then Trudy stepped out of the crack and into the cottage. The screen door closed.

Ben put his shirt back on.

Ellen walked to her bedroom. Ben and Trudy followed her. It seemed a long way away. Ellen was glad she had left the door of her room open.

“You have to climb onto the bed to see the surprise I have for you,” Ellen told Trudy.

The blanket hung down almost to the floor. Trudy grabbed hold of the edge and climbed up. She was a good climber when there weren’t any thorns to catch on her skirt. When she reached the top she waved to Ellen and Ben.

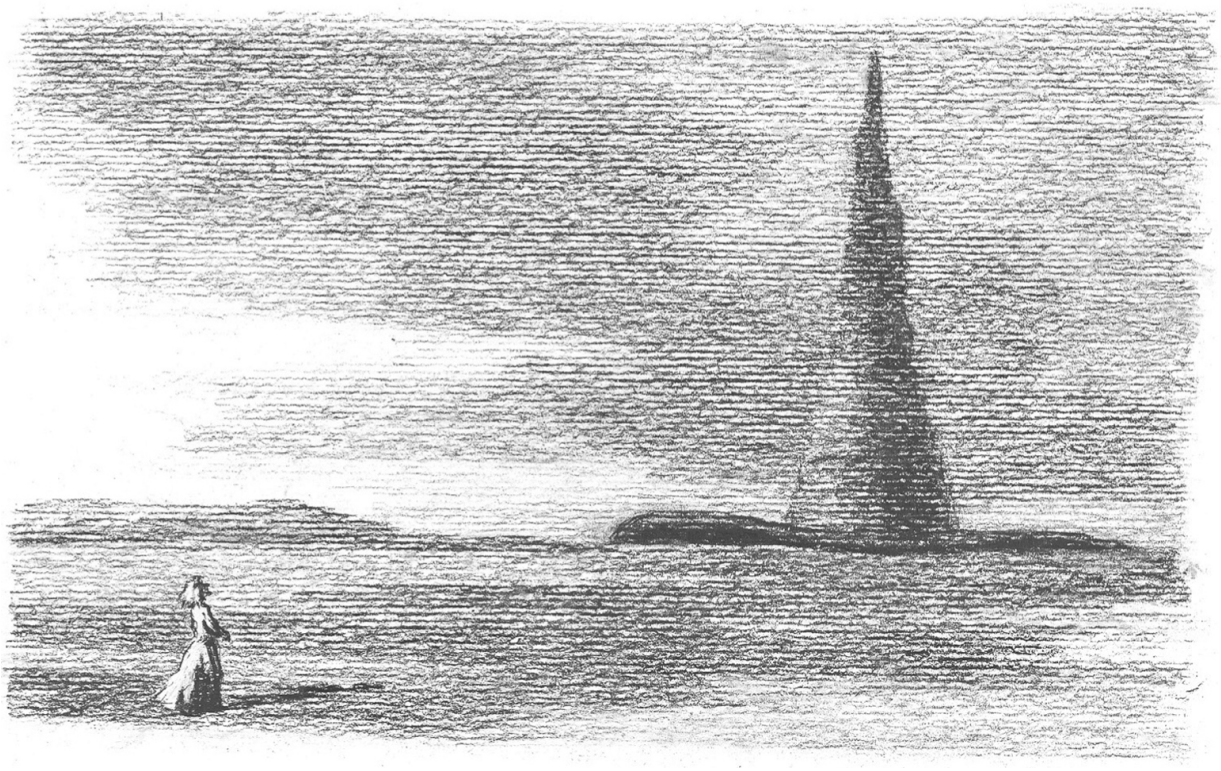
Then for a while they couldn’t see her. She was walking across the bed.

“How do you like the surprise?” Ellen called.

“Do you mean this volcano?” Trudy asked. “I’d like it better if it had a fire in it.”

Ellen had forgotten how big the hat would look. Trudy couldn’t even tell what it was. Ben started to say something. Ellen put her hand over his mouth.

“Don’t you dare tell her it’s a hat,” she whispered. “It would make her feel sad because she can’t wear it.” She yelled up to Trudy. “You can come down now.”



They walked back to the screen door.

“One, two, three, shove!” Trudy said.

They all pushed together. The screen door opened a crack. Ellen slipped through first.

The earthstar was right where they had left it on the floor of the porch.

Ellen heard the sound of heavy footsteps coming down the wooden runway to the porch. She looked up to see the landlord, Mr. Barnes.

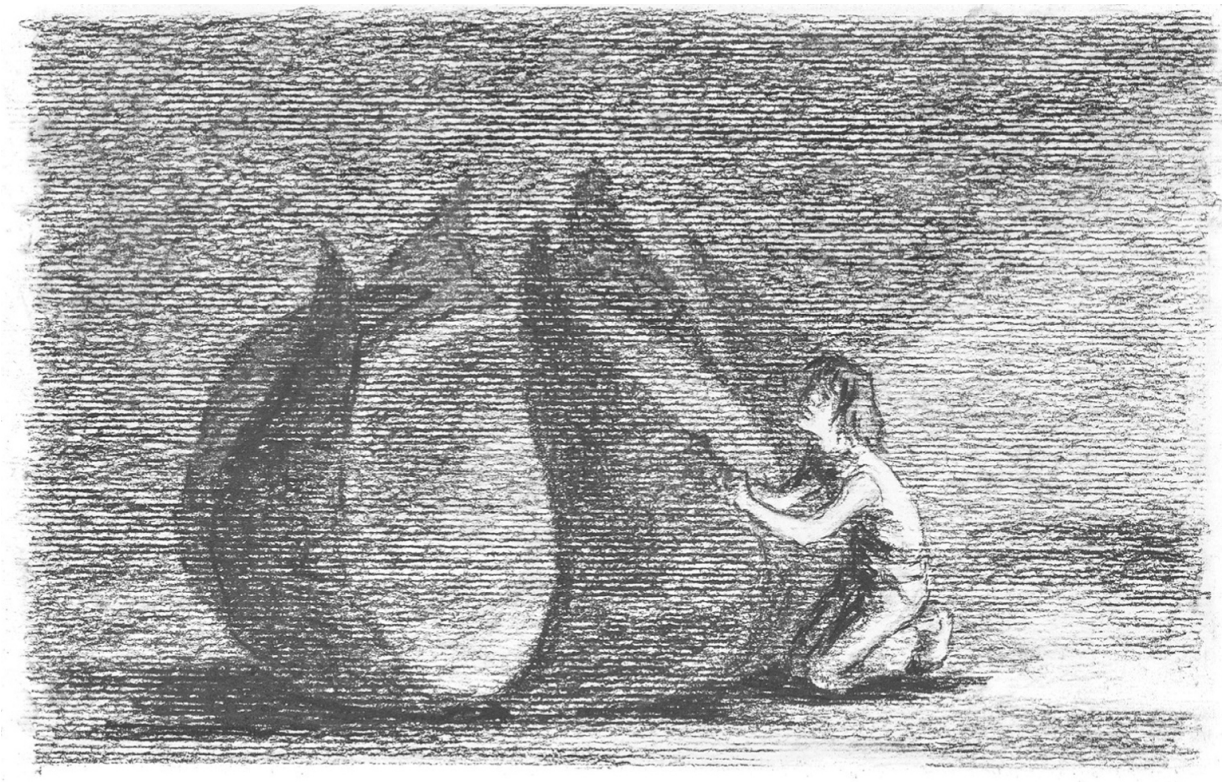
He was bringing the mail.

Ellen got down on her hands and knees and crawled behind the earthstar to hide. Mr. Barnes walked over to knock on the screen door. He didn't see the earthstar.

The floor of the porch shook with each step the landlord took. He was coming closer and closer to Ellen. Suddenly she saw an enormous shoe coming down. Mr. Barnes was going to step on the earthstar—and on Ellen!

19

Ellen held tight to the edge of one of the points of the earthstar. The big shoe was almost on top of her now. Ellen shut her eyes. “Oh, I wish I was my right size,” she sobbed.



“Oops!” Mr. Barnes said. “What in the world are you doing down there, Ellen?”

Ellen opened her eyes. The big shoe was gone. Mr. Barnes seemed to have shrunk.

He helped Ellen to her feet. “I don’t know what can be the matter with me today. I didn’t see you.”

Ellen couldn't say a word. She looked around. Everything had changed. Suddenly Ellen knew what had happened. The earthstar had made her big again!

Mr. Barnes handed her the mail and walked back to his house.

Now Ellen saw that she was holding on to the earthstar by one of its points. She put it into her pocket and turned to look for Ben and Trudy. She couldn't see them anywhere.

Ellen opened the screen door.

"Don't step on us!" she heard Ben say. Ellen looked down. Trudy and Ben were still in the doorway. They had been standing in the crack.

"You really do look like a bug in that shirt," Ellen said.

"Don't be funny," Ben said. "Why didn't you change all three of us back to our regular size?"

"Yes, you'd better change Ben and me right away before anything happens to us," Trudy said. "I see why Mother told me earthstars are dangerous."

Ellen went into the cottage. She held the door open for Ben and Trudy to come in, too. She put the mail Mr. Barnes had given her on the big table. Then Ellen took the earthstar out of her pocket. She held it up. "Make Trudy and Ben the size they ought to be."

Nothing happened.

"Please," Ellen said. "Pretty please?" She waited a minute. "Pretty earthstar!"

Ben and Trudy stayed small.

"I told you that earthstar doesn't work magic unless it feels like it," Trudy said.

Ben scratched his head. "Maybe it would feel better if we wet it."

Ellen put the star on the table beside the mail. She walked into the kitchen and took a paper cup from the dispenser. "Warm water or cold?"

"Try lukewarm," Trudy said. "That's the safest."

The screen door opened. Mrs. Sanders came into the cottage. She saw Ellen in the kitchen, which was only separated from the living-dining room by a low wall with a shelf on top.

"Ellen!" Mrs. Sanders cried. "What have you done to your hands?" She ran over to her. "Oh dear, I don't have enough bandages. I'll have to tear up a sheet. And we'd better get you to the doctor in Hawley."

Ellen looked at her hands. They were still stained with raspberry juice. And her arms were red up to the elbow.

"It's all right, Mother. Ben and I found a raspberry bush on the cliff." Ellen started to wash in the kitchen sink. "This is just berry juice."

"How many berries did you pick to get like that?" Mrs. Sanders asked.

Ellen didn't answer. She knew her mother would never believe she'd only picked a piece of one berry.

Mrs. Sanders walked to the bathroom. She took a bottle of Green Soap out of the medicine cabinet. "Come in here. I'd better wash you with this."

Mr. Sanders stepped in from the porch. "Where's Ben? I want him to help me put the tarp on the boat." He looked around the cottage and saw the mail lying on the big table. Mr. Sanders walked over to it. "What's this?" He picked up the earthstar.

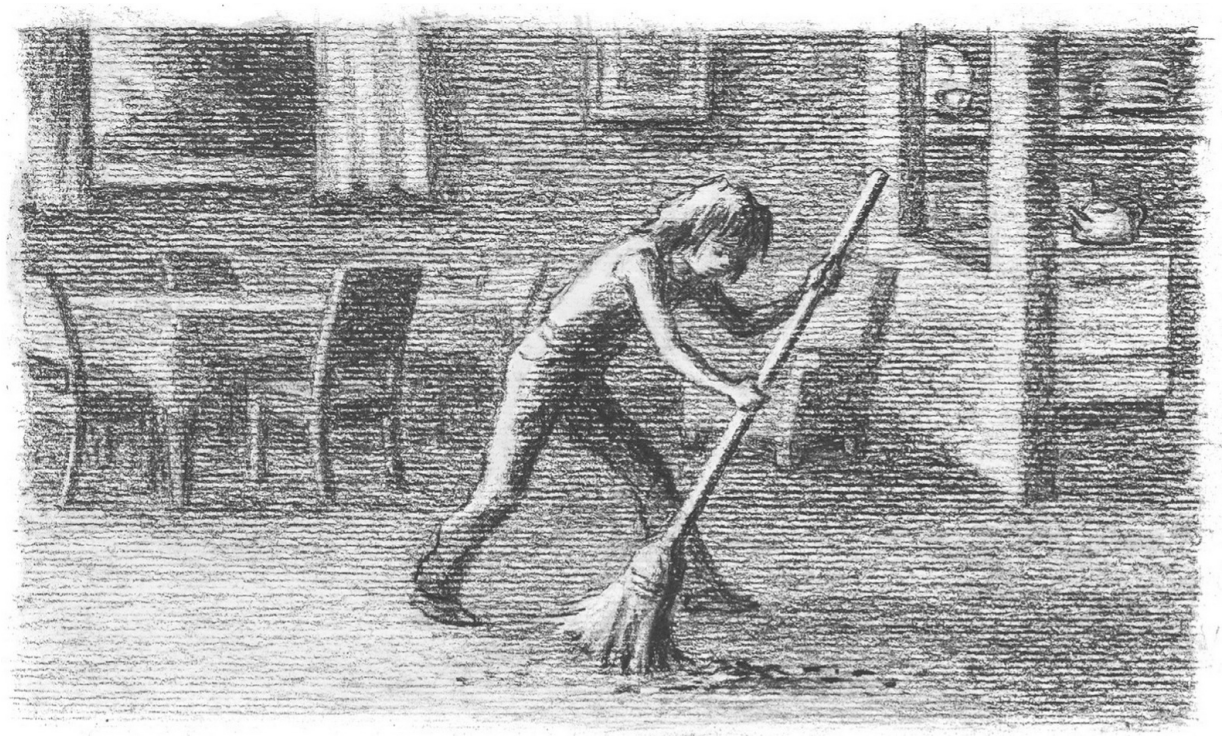
Mr. Sanders started to call, "Ben! Ben!" He frowned. "I wish for once I could find that boy when I want him."

An instant later he blinked and rubbed his eyes.

Ben was standing right beside him.

20

Ellen looked out of the bathroom door. She saw her father put the earthstar back on the table. Then Mr. Sanders and Ben went down to the dock to cover the boat for the night.



As soon as her mother had finished washing her, Ellen went to the big table and picked up the earthstar. She put it into her pocket and looked around for Trudy.

There was no sign of her in the living-dining room.

"Ellen," Mrs. Sanders called from the kitchen, "please set the table for supper."

Ellen went into the kitchen to get the plates and silverware. She looked on all the shelves. Trudy was not there.

When supper was ready, Mrs. Sanders banged the gong to call Ben and Mr. Sanders.

All during the meal Ellen was wondering what had happened to Trudy. She remembered how big Mr. Barnes' shoe had seemed. Ellen looked at her sneakers and then at her father's shoes.

After supper she swept the floor. Ellen looked hard at all the sweepings. She was afraid of what she might find. But all she swept up were crumbs from the table and dirt tracked in from outdoors.

"Thank you, Ellen," her mother said. "It's nice of you to sweep the floor for me. Daddy and I are going out in the canoe now. There's going to be a full moon tonight."

Mr. and Mrs. Sanders went out of the cottage and walked down to the dock.

It was Ben's turn to wash the dishes. Ellen dried.

"Where's Trudy?" Ben asked. "I haven't seen her for ages."

"I don't know." Ellen put the silverware in the drawer. "I've been looking for her."

Ben wrung out the dishcloth and hung it over the faucet. "I saw a spiderweb under the sink in the bathroom. It would be just like Trudy to get caught in it." Ben went to see.

Ellen finished drying the dishes. She went into her bedroom. The pointed hat was still on the bed. A little green and brown thing was curled up next to it.

It was Trudy. She was fast asleep.

Ellen remembered the earthstar. She took it out of her pocket and looked at it. It was dry and curly. Maybe Trudy ought to fly back to her cave on it, Ellen thought. She'd be safer there. There was nobody in the cave to step on her.

Ellen picked up the hat and looked around for a place to put it. There wasn't room on top of the little dresser.

"I wish the hat wasn't so big," Ellen said.

Suddenly she heard Trudy's voice. She had opened her eyes and was sitting up on Ellen's bed. "Where's the volcano?" Trudy wailed.

“I’ve been waiting and waiting for you to light it up. I want to see how it works.”

Ellen looked at the hat. It was so small now that at first she thought it had disappeared.

Trudy caught sight of it. She clasped her hands together. “Oh, Ellen,” she said, “what a beautiful hat! And just my size!”

21

Ben came into Ellen's room. "I thought I heard Trudy's voice." He stopped short and stared.

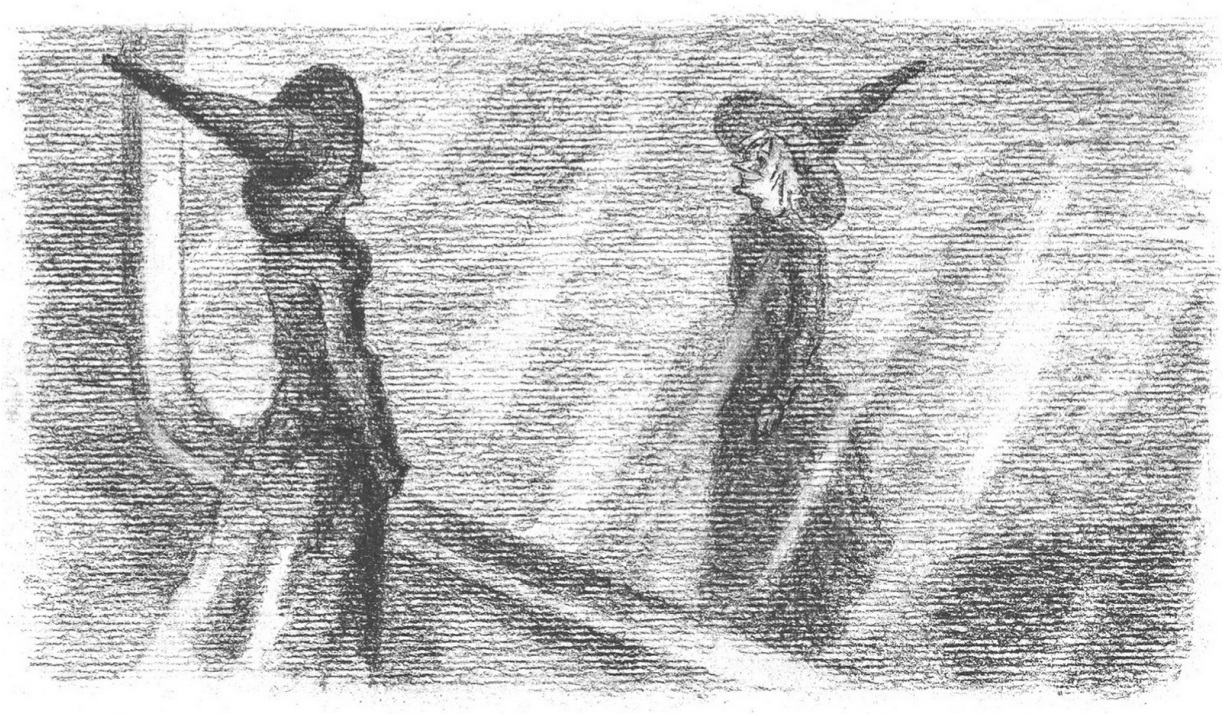
Ellen was holding Trudy on the palm of her hand. Trudy had the pointed hat on her head with the shoelaces tied under her chin.

Ellen carried her into the bathroom so she could see herself in the mirror.

Ben came after them. "Be careful not to drop her into the washbasin, Ellen. She might go down the drain."

Trudy looked into the mirror. She smoothed her scraggly gray hair and straightened her brown skirt. Then she smiled at herself. "How do I look?"

"Just like a real witch," Ben told her. "But why didn't you make yourself big instead of making the hat small?"



“I had nothing to do with it,” Trudy said. “Ellen has the earthstar.”

Ellen had put the earthstar back into the pocket of her jeans. She took it out. “It doesn’t look at all like a star now,” she said. “But it still works—when it wants to.”

“Give it to me.” Ben reached for the earthstar. Ellen handed it to him. Ben held it under the faucet in the washbasin and dripped water on it. Slowly the points of the star turned darker. They began to uncurl and stretch out flat around the white puffball.

“Don’t get the earthstar too wet, Ben,” Ellen said. “It’ll be like an octopus. And Trudy will have trouble reaching the points when she wants to fly on it.”

“I don’t feel like flying right now,” Trudy said. “I’m hungry.”

“Oh, Trudy, I’m sorry.” Ellen carried her out of the bathroom and put her on the big dining table. “I didn’t save you anything from our supper. I knew you wouldn’t want lamb chops.”

Ben went into the kitchen. “Do you like cornflakes, Trudy?”

“I like corn,” she said.

Ben climbed on a chair and took down the box of cornflakes from the shelf over the refrigerator. He put the box on the table beside Trudy. Then he went to get a bowl and a container of milk. He held up the earthstar. “I don’t know whether to ask the star to make the bowl small or Trudy big.”

Ellen opened the box and took out one cornflake. It was longer and wider than Trudy. Ellen broke off a piece and gave it to Trudy.

Trudy nibbled the bit of cornflake. “Delicious!”

“You ought to have some milk,” Ellen said.

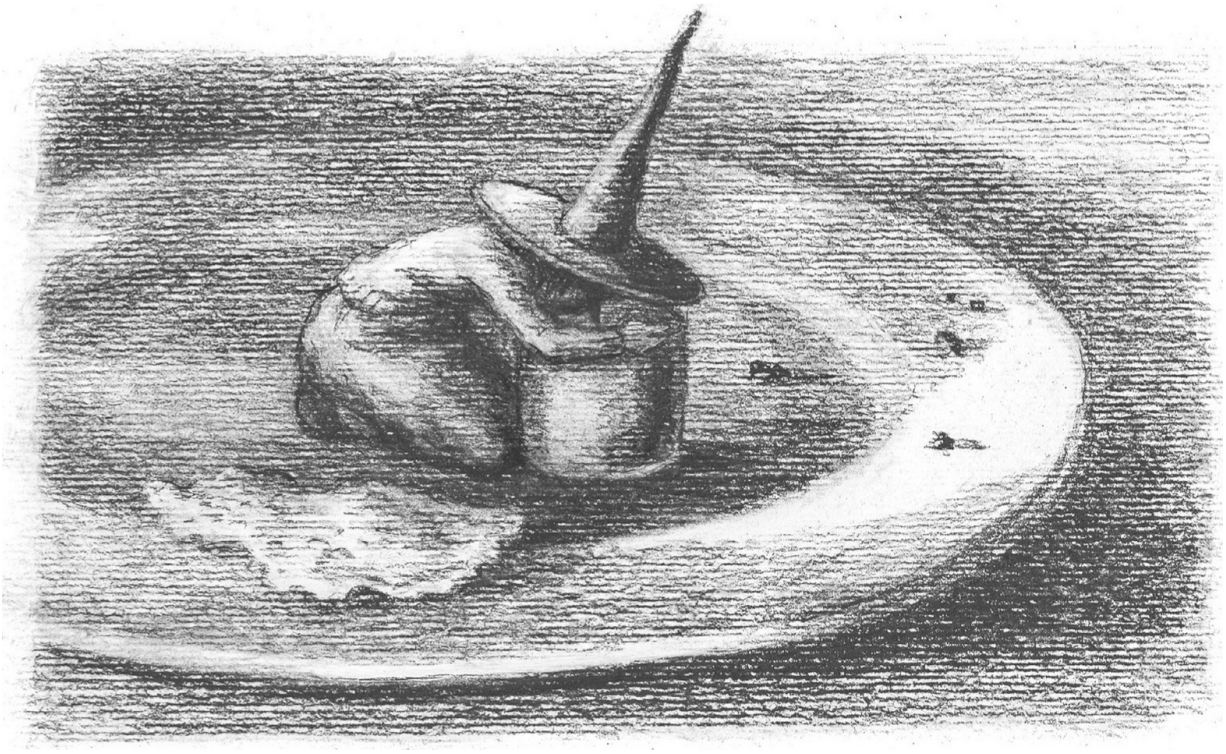
Ben put the earthstar on the table and went back into the kitchen. He looked at all the bottles and jars in the door of the refrigerator. The bottle of lemon juice had a yellow cap with a hole in it to shake out the juice. The hole was covered with a small green cap.

Ben unscrewed the cap. “Trudy ought to be able to drink out of this.”

Ben rinsed the lemon juice off the cap and filled it with milk. Ellen cut up a raisin with her mother’s kitchen scissors. They put the cup of milk and the raisin bits on a small plate along with the rest of the cornflake. Then Trudy climbed up on the plate and sat down to finish her supper.

22

Trudy crunched through several bits of cornflake. She chewed for a long time on one of the pieces of raisin. But there seemed almost as much of that left when she finished as when she began.



Trudy wouldn't take the hat off when she drank her milk. The green cap was too big for her to lift. Trudy put her chin in the milk and lapped it up the way a puppy would.

At last Trudy rubbed her stomach. "I'm full." She stood up and walked to the edge of the plate.

Ellen picked her up and put her down on the table beside the earthstar. It was all spread out now and looked like a perfect star.

“Let’s see if you’re still in the mood to fly,” Trudy said to the mushroom. She climbed onto the puffball and pulled back one of the points. The earthstar sailed up into the air. Trudy circled the room three times and then landed again on the table.

“Are you going to fly back to your cave now?” Ellen asked.

Trudy looked at her. “Oh, Ellen, do I have to? It will be so lonely. And I don’t have any more matches. Even if I did, I couldn’t light them. The matches are longer than I am.”

Ellen took a look at the plate with the bits of raisin and cornflake on it. “You don’t eat very much. And you don’t take up much room. It ought to be easy to find a place for you to sleep,” she said. “But don’t let my mother and father find out that you’re here. It might upset them.”

Ben went into his bedroom. “Ellen,” he called, “bring Trudy in here.”

Ellen carried Trudy into Ben’s room. He was bending over his dresser. The top drawer was open. There was a small matchbox in it. Ben folded a piece of Kleenex and fitted it into the box. “How’s that for a bed?”

Ellen put Trudy into the matchbox.

Trudy untied her hat and took it off. Then she lay down. “Lovely.”

“Where’s the cover to the matchbox, Ben?” Ellen asked. “I think we can use it for a table.”

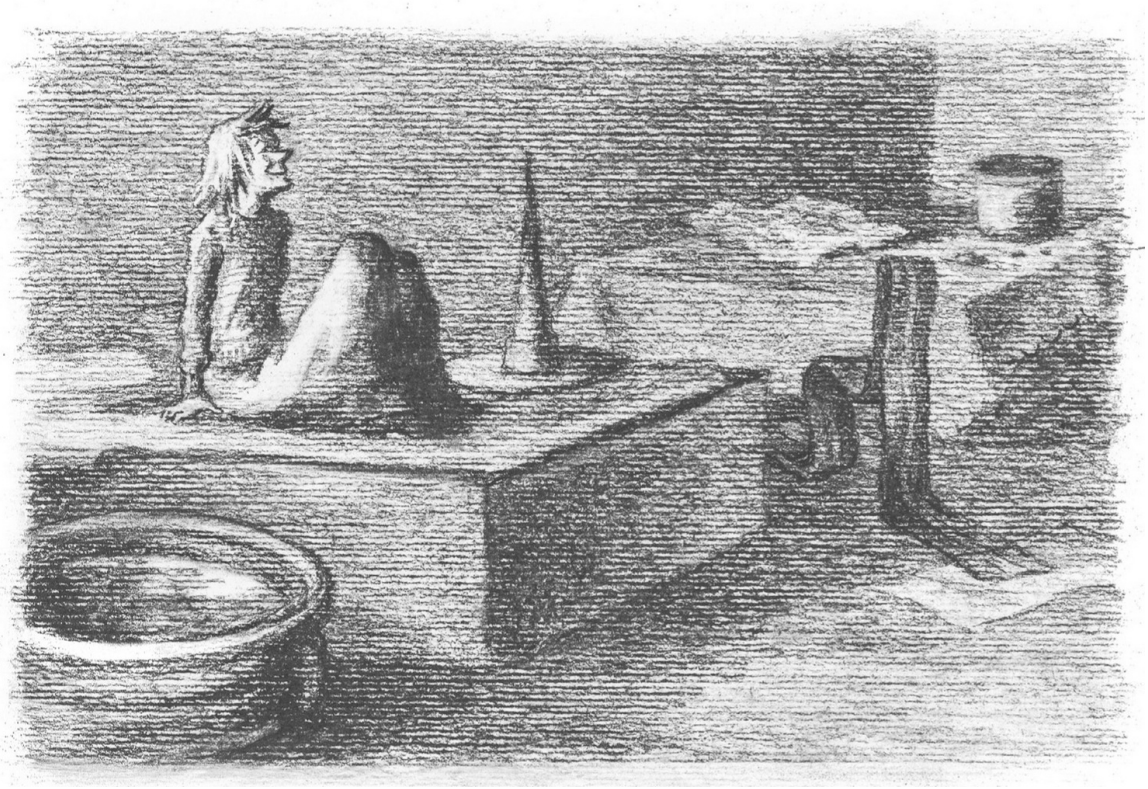
Ellen used the kitchen scissors to cut a little tablecloth out of white notepaper. The scissors made tiny scallops all along the edge.

Ben put the table into the drawer. And Ellen set all the food left from Trudy’s supper on the white paper tablecloth.

Then Ben took a green twist-tie out of a box of plastic bags. He bent the twist-tie to make a little chair. It was rather tippy, so Ben used Scotch tape to stick the chair to the bottom of the drawer. Trudy tried it. “Perfect!”

Ellen filled the top from a bottle of Seven-Up with warm water. She put it into the drawer and floated a scrap of soap on the water. “I thought you might like a bath, Trudy. You’re sort of sticky.”

Trudy rubbed her chin. “I’ll try anything once,” she said. “It might be fun.”



“Now you’re all set,” Ben told her.

“Oh, Ben,” Ellen said, “I just remembered that Mother straightens your drawers. She leaves mine alone. She says I’m old enough to keep my own things neat.”

Ben scowled. “You just want Trudy to sleep in *your* room, Ellen. It’s not fair. It was my idea to make a bedroom in a drawer.”

“But, Ben,” Ellen said, “Trudy would smother if Mother dropped a pile of socks on her.”

In the end Ben agreed to let Trudy live in Ellen’s drawer. But he wouldn’t help move the little furniture. Ellen had to do that herself.

23

Ellen heard the screen door bang. Her mother and father had come back into the cottage. She put the earthstar into her dresser drawer along with Trudy. Ellen left the drawer open a couple of inches so Trudy could have a little light and air.

"Better get to bed, children," Mrs. Sanders called. "You've had a busy day."

Ben was already in the shower. He went to bed without saying good night to Ellen. She knew he was still angry because Trudy was in her room instead of his.

Ellen undressed and rushed to get ready for bed. She was so tired she ached all over. The minute she lay down she fell asleep.

Sometime later in the night Ellen was wakened by moonlight shining through the window onto her pillow. She sat up in bed. Something whizzed past Ellen's ear.

It was Trudy. She was flying around and around the room on the earthstar.

When she saw that Ellen was awake, Trudy landed on her bed. She stepped off the earthstar. “Ellen,” she wailed, “I feel awful.”

“Was it something we gave you to eat, Trudy?” Ellen asked.

“No, no. Nothing like that. It’s the moon,” Trudy said. “It’s full tonight. And at full-moon time the witches have a meeting. I keep telling myself I don’t mind missing it. But I do miss it. Oh, I do!” She covered her face with her hands and sobbed.

The door of the room creaked. Someone was coming in.

“Hide!” Ellen whispered.

Trudy ran under the edge of the blanket.

A moment later Ben stepped into the room. “Tell Trudy to cut out all the racket, Ellen,” he said. “How can someone so tiny make so much noise? She woke me up. You’re lucky it’s my room and not Mom and Dad’s that’s next to yours. You know how mad Dad gets if you wake him.” Ben noticed the earthstar on the bed. He picked it up. “Maybe we should send that witch back to her cave after all.”

Trudy came out from under the blanket. Ben looked at her. He turned to Ellen. “What’s the matter with her?”

“She wants to go to a witches’ meeting,” Ellen told him.

“You see,” Ben whispered. “Once a witch, always a witch!”

Trudy’s shoulders were shaking. She tried not to make any noise. But little sniffs and groans kept coming out of her.

“Trudy’s really getting to be an awful bother to take care of,” Ben said. “I just wish she knew how to take care of herself.”

24

Trudy stopped crying. “Put the earthstar down, Ben,” she ordered.

Ben and Ellen had never heard her sound like that. It was a little scary.

Ben laid the earthstar on the bed beside Trudy. She held on to one of the points and whispered something to the star.

Wham!

Something knocked Ellen right out of her bed onto the floor. She got to her feet.

Ben grabbed her arm. “Look at the witch!”

Ellen looked at the bed. A tall thin woman in a pointed hat was standing on it. She was holding the earthstar in her hand.

Ellen and Ben were really scared now.

The woman stepped down off the bed. “I’m sorry, Ellen,” she said in a low voice. “I should have been more careful. Did you get hurt?”

“No,” Ellen said. She was ashamed now that she had been afraid. Trudy was still herself, even though she was big again.

Trudy looked out of the window at the full moon. “It will be midnight soon. I don’t have any time to lose. Didn’t I see a broom in your kitchen, Ellen?”

“That’s the old one that goes with the cottage,” Ellen said. “It isn’t much good. Mother usually brings one of ours from home.”

“That one looked just right to me. May I borrow it?” Trudy asked.

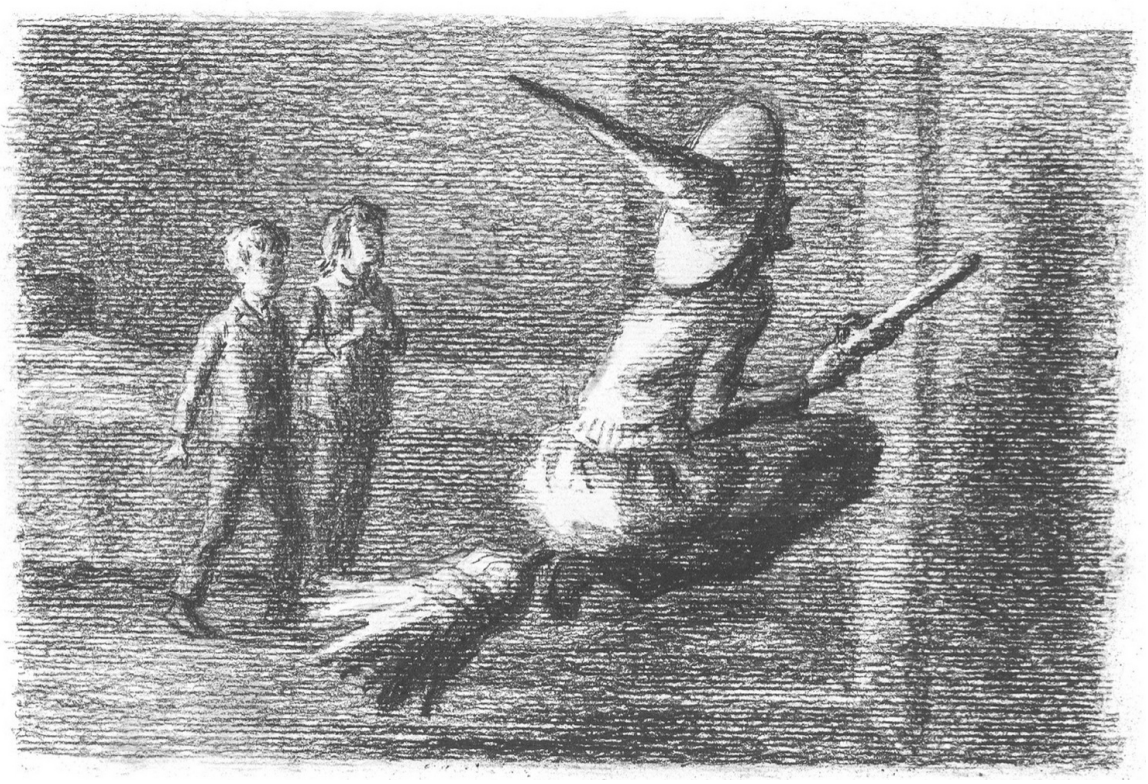
“What do you want it for?” Ben said.

“They won’t let me into the witches’ meeting without a hat and broom.” Trudy patted the pointed hat. “This hat will do nicely.”

Ellen tiptoed to the kitchen. She brought back the broom and gave it to Trudy.

Trudy sat down on the broom. She whispered to the earthstar. The broom rose in the air. It floated over to the door.

It looked like such fun that Ellen forgot that she had ever been afraid. “Oh, Trudy,” she begged, “take me with you.”



“Only witches are allowed at these meetings,” Trudy said. She rubbed her pointed chin. “Wait a minute. I have an idea.” Trudy bent over the earthstar and said something so softly that Ellen couldn’t hear what it was.

Ellen turned to Ben. He put his hand on her head and scratched her behind the ears.

“What are you doing, Ben?” Ellen asked.

“Sh-sh. Not so loud,” Ben said. “You don’t want Mom and Dad to come in here and see you like this.”

Ellen lowered her voice. “What are you talking about?”

Ben rubbed her back. “She’s purring now, Trudy. Do you think she’s trying to say something?”

“Of course,” Trudy said. “Jump on the broom, Ellen.”

Ellen jumped way up in the air and landed on the bristles of the broom. She didn’t know how she did it.

“That looks like fun,” Ben said. “Can I go to the meeting, too, Trudy?”

“I wish you’d asked earlier. I’m in such a rush that I can’t think what to change you into,” Trudy said. “Would you like to be a frog?”

“No,” Ben said. “I want to be a cat like Ellen.”

“Better not,” Trudy told him.

“Please, Trudy,” Ben said.

“Oh, all right. I don’t have time to argue. I just hope this isn’t a mistake.” Trudy whispered something to the earthstar.

A second later a striped orange cat jumped onto the bristles of the broom beside Ellen.

25

Ellen held tight to the bristles of the broom. It was flying high over the rolling, tree-covered mountains. The moon was so bright that Ellen could see every whisker on Ben's furry face. A cold wind swept them along. The two cats kept close together for warmth.

"I wonder where the witches have their meeting," Ellen said.

"We'll soon find out," Ben told her.

"I'm glad you can understand me now. But then, cats always seem to understand each other." Ellen looked at her paws. They were darker than Ben's. "What do I look like?"

“Like a real witch’s cat—black.” Ben curved his neck and looked at his tail. “I wonder why the earthstar didn’t make me black.”

“Maybe the earthstar only did what Trudy asked it to,” Ellen said. “She seems to have found out how to make it work.”

“I notice she’s keeping the secret to herself,” Ben said.

“Oh,” Ellen said, “I forgot Mother told us not to go anywhere without telling her. Ben, we shouldn’t have come.”

“I wish we hadn’t,” Ben whispered. “You can’t trust a witch. But it’s too late now.”

They flew over a bunch of lights. Ben and Ellen looked down. But Trudy just stared straight ahead.

“That must be a town down there,” Ellen said.

The broom flew faster. Ellen felt the wind whipping through her tail. Now there were more towns. Then, in the distance, they saw tall buildings. A moment later the broom was over a river. Ellen and Ben could see the moon reflected in the water.

Seconds afterward Ben looked down. “We’re right over the city, Ellen.”

They flew over another river and then over rows of houses. The air was warmer here. Ellen saw a tower with a lighted clock in it.

The broom was coming down now. It swung over a highway and dived down to land on top of a hill. There were trees all around.

“We’re here.” Trudy hopped off the broom and shook out her long skirt.

Ellen and Ben jumped off the bristles. Trudy tucked the broom under her arm.

Battered old-fashioned lampposts stood here and there along a walk. They didn’t give much light.

Ellen leaped onto the back of a broken stone bench. She craned her neck to look around. “Ben, I’m sure we’ve been here before.”

Ben jumped up beside her. “Listen!”

Ellen heard the wail of a siren on a police car. There was the sound of cars rushing along a road at the foot of the hill.

Ben flicked his ears. “We’re on top of Lookout Mountain in Prospect Park.”

“Trudy told us she came from Brooklyn,” Ellen said.

Trudy was going down the walk. It curved around the top of the hill.

“Come on,” Ben said. “We’d better stay close to her.”

The two cats jumped down from the bench and raced after Trudy. She was walking very fast.

“Halt!” a raspy voice said. “Who goes there?”

Ellen could feel all her fur standing on end. She looked at Ben. His yellow eyes were gleaming like two lights in the darkness.

A shadowy figure stood in the middle of the walk in front of them.

It was a witch.

26

“Don’t you know me, Matilda?” Trudy asked.

“Oh, it’s you, Gertrude,” the witch said. “I thought you were kicked out of the coven.”

“All a mistake, Matilda,” Trudy said. “I’m here to see the Head Witch.”

Matilda looked at Ben and Ellen. “What’s this? Cats? You never kept a cat before, Gertrude. That was always a black mark against you. Well, I see you have a hat and broom. Go ahead.”

The witch stepped aside. Trudy walked past her. Ben and Ellen had to run to keep up with her.

The path went around a small field at the top of the hill. The weeds were too high for the two cats to see over. But they could hear the sound of voices. And there was a strange smell in the air.

Trudy left the path and started across the field. The smell became stronger. Ellen didn’t like it. She and Ben followed Trudy through the weeds.

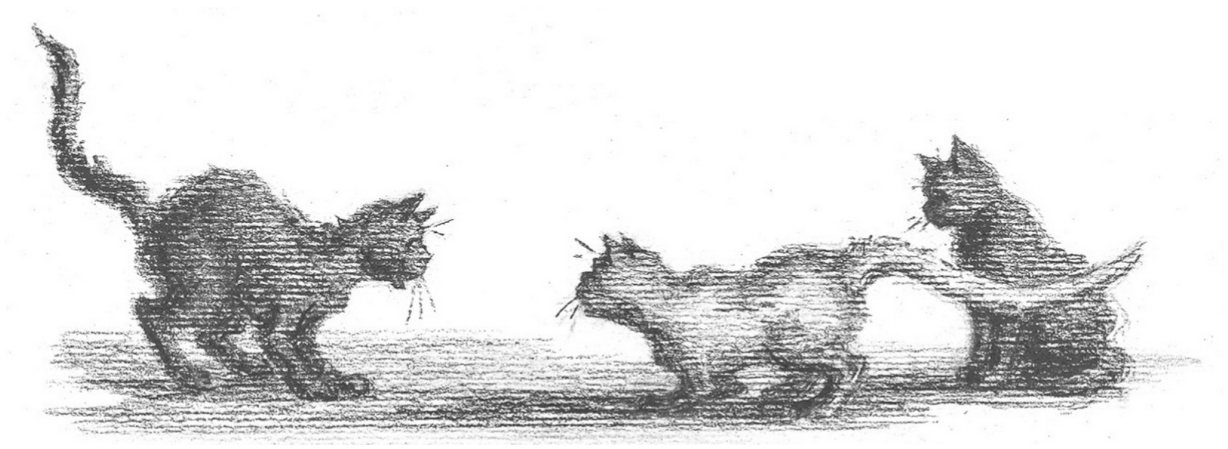
They came to a big iron pot in the middle of the field. A small hot fire burned under it. Clouds of yellow steam drifted up into the air from the pot. It was the steam that smelled so bad.

Trudy walked toward the fire. A group of witches stood around it. They all wore pointed hats and carried brooms.

Most of the witches had cats. A mangy black cat raced over to sniff Ben and Ellen. He hissed and showed his sharp fangs.

Ben hissed back. “I guess he knows we’re not really cats,” he whispered to Ellen.

The cat backed away.



“Ben,” Ellen said, “the witches are throwing something into the fire.”

“I wish they wouldn’t,” Ben said. “I think that’s what’s making that awful stink.”

“What do you suppose they’re burning?” Ellen asked.

Ben strained his eyes to see. “It could be toads—or frogs,” he said. “Maybe that’s why Trudy wanted to turn me into a frog, so she’d have something to throw in the fire.”

“Don’t talk like that, Ben,” Ellen said.

Now they both heard a yowling singsong. One of the witches was chanting.

Ellen put her paws over her ears. “Oh, Ben, I wish we hadn’t come.”

The witch who was chanting was taller and stronger-looking than all the others. She had bright orange hair and orange fingernails. And the broom she had tucked under her arm had orange bristles.

“She must be the Head Witch,” Ellen said.

Clang! The orange-haired witch banged her broom handle against the rim of the pot.

“That broom must have a metal handle,” Ben said. “It makes almost as much noise as our gong.”

“Inspection time!” the Head Witch said in a loud voice.

One by one the witches stood in front of the Head Witch. She looked at their hats and their brooms. When she saw Trudy’s

scraggly broom, the Head Witch nodded. “Very good.”

She took a look at the hat. “Much too new-looking,” she said. “Better put a dent or two in it.”

The Head Witch caught sight of Trudy’s face under the hat. She frowned.

“What are *you* doing here?”

Trudy didn’t answer.

The Head Witch saw Ben and Ellen hiding behind Trudy’s long brown skirt. “I suppose you think your having cats will make me let you in,” she jeered. “Stupid! You know the rule is one cat per witch.”

The Head Witch leaned over and grabbed Ben. “I’ll take charge of this one. He just matches my hair.”

27

The Head Witch held Ben up by the nape of his neck. “Just what I always wanted,” she cackled, “an orange cat.”

Ellen looked at Trudy. Why didn’t she do anything? Trudy was holding the earthstar in her hand. She could easily save Ben.

But Trudy didn’t move.

A cold chill ran down Ellen’s back. Ben had been right all along. You couldn’t trust Trudy. She must have known just how much the Head Witch wanted an orange cat. That’s why she turned Ben into one. She was planning to use Ben to buy her way back into the coven.

Ellen saw the Head Witch’s long orange nails digging into Ben’s soft fur. He yowled and tried to bite the witch. But she held him high in the air. Ben couldn’t do a thing.

But Ellen could.

She made a flying leap at the witch.

The Head Witch saw her coming. She reached out and grabbed Ellen by the neck. Now she was holding both cats in the air. The skin on Ellen’s neck was pulled tight. She was choking.

Suddenly Ellen heard Trudy’s voice. “Put down those cats!”

“Make me!” the Head Witch jeered.

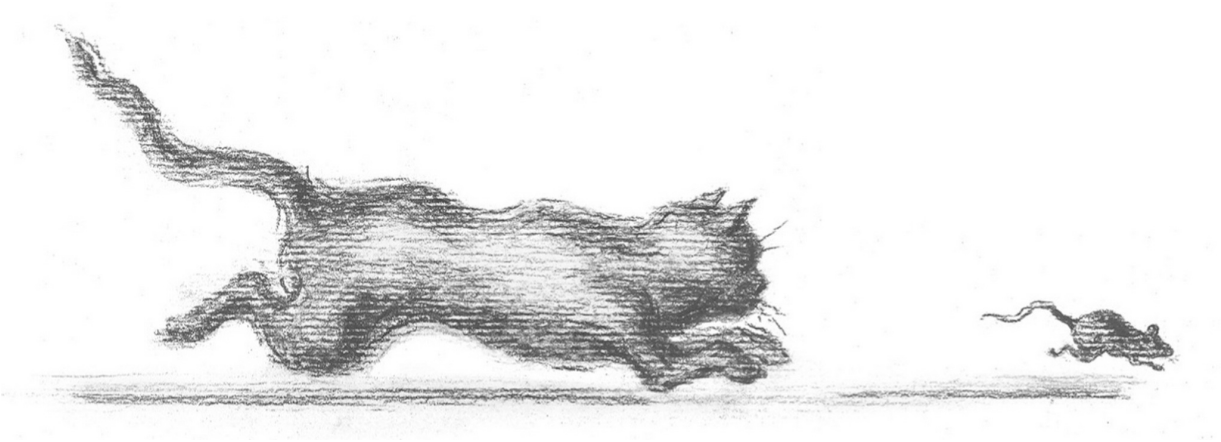
The next moment Ellen fell to the ground. Ben was beside her. But where was the Head Witch? Ellen couldn’t see her anywhere.

Something wiggled out from under Ben’s paw. It was small and gray, with a long naked tail.

“Catch that mouse!” Trudy yelled.

Ben jumped at it. But the mouse dodged him and ran around the iron pot. Ellen chased after it. Ben turned and went the other way

around the pot. The mouse ran right into him.



Ben picked the mouse up by its tail and ran over to Trudy. He laid the mouse at her feet.

The mouse squeaked and jumped onto Trudy's broom. It climbed all the way to the top and sat there, shaking.

Ben got up onto the bristles of the broom. He stood on his hind legs to claw at the mouse. It clasped its little paws together and looked up into Trudy's face. Then it began to squeak.

Trudy held the earthstar to her mouth and whispered to it.

Now Ellen heard the harsh voice of the Head Witch. It was coming from the mouse.

26

“Gertrude,” the mouse begged, “don’t let those cats eat me!”

Ben jumped off the broom and sat down beside Ellen. “Ick,” he said. “Who’d want to eat *her*? I just want to give the mean old thing a scare.”

“Gertrude, you can join the coven. Only please change me back to myself,” the mouse said.

Trudy just stared at her.

“You can be Head Witch, Gertrude,” the mouse sobbed.

The other witches were silent. They stood around the fire and watched. The yellow steam drifted over them.

Trudy picked the mouse off the end of the broom. She held her by the nape of her neck just as the witch had held the cats.

“I don’t want your silly Head Witch job,” Trudy said. “And I wouldn’t join your coven again for anything in the world. I see now that there are much better things to do with my time. I don’t know why I came back to this smelly place at all. Just see that you leave my cats alone in the future.”

“I promise, Gertrude,” the mouse said.

Trudy whispered to the earthstar. At the same time she let go of the mouse.

Crash! The orange-haired witch fell to the ground. Her hat rolled off her head.

Trudy sat down on her broom. Ben and Ellen jumped onto the bristles.

The Head Witch was crawling around on the ground, looking for her hat.

Trudy didn’t bother to say good-bye to anybody. She pointed her broomstick at the sky. The broom sailed up into the air. Ben and Ellen looked down. For a moment or two they could still see the red glow of the fire. But they couldn’t smell the yellow steam anymore.

They flew high over the city. The moon was going down now. And the sky was speckled with thousands of stars.

29

The broom flew so fast on the way home that everything under them seemed to be a blur. In almost no time they landed in front of the cottage. The two cats jumped off the bristles.

Trudy whispered to the earthstar. At once Ellen and Ben were back to being themselves. It felt funny to be wearing pajamas.

Trudy handed Ellen the broom. “It’s the best one I ever had.”

“I’m sorry you can’t keep it, Trudy. But it belongs to the landlord.” Ellen wondered what Mr. Barnes would say if he knew his broom could fly.

“I don’t need it anymore,” Trudy said. She held up the earthstar. “I’m going now. Thanks for all your help.”

“You didn’t really need any help,” Ben said.

“Oh, yes, I did,” Trudy told him. “You and Ellen helped me more than you know.”

“Trudy,” Ben asked, “are all earthstars magic?”

“Every one,” Trudy said. “But no two of them work the same way. That’s what makes them so dangerous.” She held the earthstar close to her mouth.

“Oh, Trudy,” Ellen said, “will we ever see you again?”

Trudy smiled. “Of course you will.” She whispered something to the earthstar. A moment later she was gone.

Ellen and Ben were quiet for a little while. Then Ellen said, “She never really was a witch, you know.”

“What do you mean?” Ben asked.

Ellen stepped onto the runway leading to the porch. “Witches can’t cry tears.” Ben thought about this.

“You don’t have to be a witch to work magic with an earthstar,” Ellen reminded him.

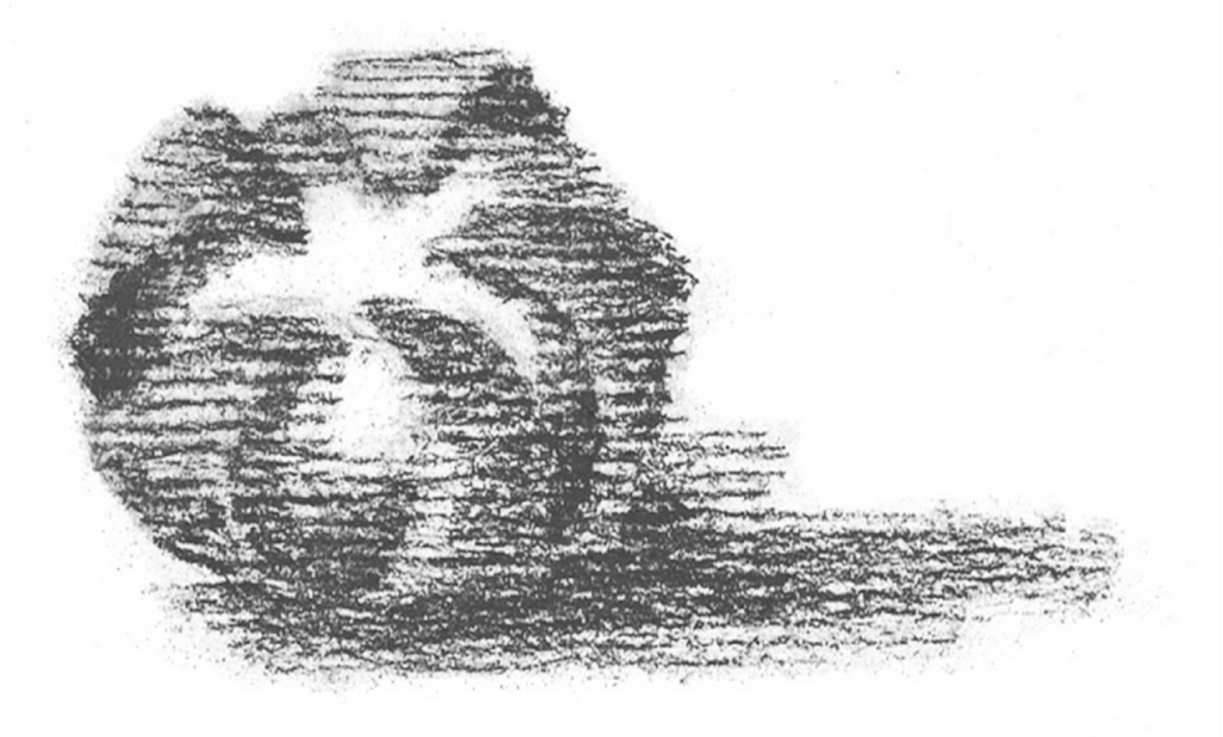
“That’s right,” Ben said. “And I’m pretty sure I know how that one works.”

Ellen nodded. “I think I know, too. And I’ll bet we could figure out how to work another one.”

Ben grinned. “Even if it’s dangerous?”

“We’d better get back to bed before Mother and Daddy wake up,” Ellen said. “Tomorrow we can look for an earthstar.”

They tiptoed past the sleeping birds on the porch. Ellen quietly opened the screen door, and they went into the cottage.



RUTH CHEW

MOSTLY MAGIC

Illustrated by the Author

“Rats!” Emily looked out the window at the blue summer sky. “What a day to be stuck in the house waiting for a grouchy old plumber!”

Dick stood beside her. He looked out at the Brooklyn street. “I wonder how long it will be before Mr. Barstow shows up.”

Emily yanked at her brother’s arm.

“Come on, Dick. It’ll be lunchtime before we get the breakfast dishes into the dishwasher.”

The two children turned away from the living room window and started toward the kitchen. They were only halfway through the dining room when the doorbell rang.

Dick raced to open the front door.

A small man was standing on the front stoop outside. “Hello. Are you the people with the leak in the ceiling?”

“You’re not Mr. Barstow,” Dick said.

The little man smiled. “Mr. Barstow has too much work today. He asked me to do this job for him.”

Emily came to the door. She looked at the plumber. His hands were dirty and he needed a shave. But he had a nice smile. “Mother and Daddy are both at work,” Emily said. “I’ll show you the leak.”

The plumber turned to look up and down the street. “Mr. Checkers was following me,” he explained. “But I don’t see him now. I hope he didn’t get lost.”

He stepped into the front hall. “My name is Pete. What’s yours?”

“Emily. This is my brother, Dick.” Emily walked into the living room. Dick and the plumber followed her.

Emily pointed to a big damp place in one corner of the ceiling. “We can’t find out where the leak’s coming from.”

“Three people have tried to fix it so far,” Dick told the plumber. “Dad even had a new tile floor put in the shower upstairs.”

“Leaks are funny things,” Pete said. “I remember one everybody thought was from a bathtub drain. Guess what the trouble was.”

“A toilet,” Dick said. “Mom says I flushed my first toothbrush down ours.”

“That’s a good way to make a toilet overflow.” Pete looked at the damp spot on the ceiling. “But the leak I’m talking about came from a radiator in the bathroom.”

“There’s no radiator in our bathroom,” Dick said. “We use an electric heater in the winter.”

“Dick, remember we have to load the dishwasher.” Emily started toward the kitchen.

Dick came after her. “Don’t be so bossy just because you’re older than I am.”

“Mother told me not to let you bother the plumber,” Emily reminded him.

“I’m not bothering Pete. I’m trying to help him figure out where the leak’s coming from.” Dick turned to look back at the plumber. Suddenly he grabbed hold of Emily’s hand and pulled her into the kitchen. “Em,” he whispered, “there’s something *spooky* going on!”

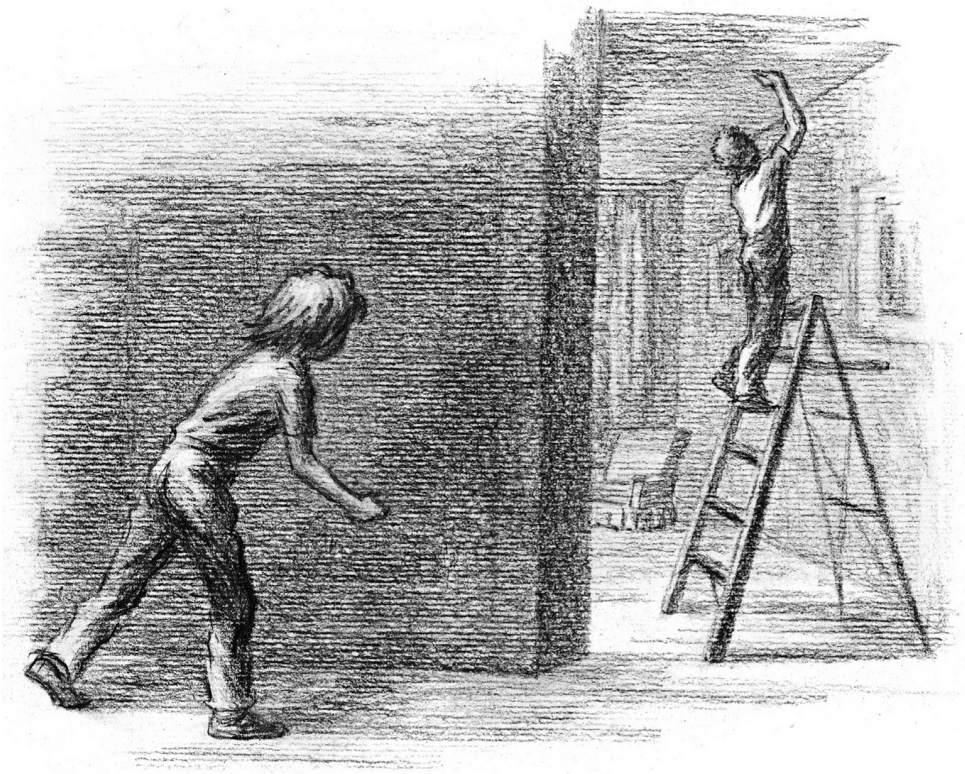
Emily opened the dishwasher. “What are you talking about?”

Dick’s eyes were big and round. He looked scared. “Go see what that guy’s up to.”

Emily tiptoed back through the dining room and peeked through the wide doorway into the living room.

The little plumber was standing on an aluminum stepladder, feeling the damp ceiling. Emily was quite sure he wasn’t carrying anything when he came into the house.

Where had the ladder come from?



2

Emily was trying to find room for four cereal bowls on the top shelf of the dishwasher. “Pete must have left his ladder outside, and we didn’t hear him go out to get it.”

Emily didn’t really believe this, but she had to tell Dick something so he wouldn’t be scared.

“He must be awfully quick,” Dick said. “We’d just left the living room when I spotted him on that ladder.”

The last dish was crammed in now. Emily added the soap and turned on the dishwasher.

Crash! For a moment Emily thought all the dishes were breaking. But the sound was coming from the living room. Dick and Emily ran to see what was going on.

Pete was still on the stepladder. He was hitting the ceiling with a small hammer. The damp plaster cracked and fell. Now there was a jagged hole in the ceiling.

“Mom’s not going to like that,” Dick whispered. “You know how she hates mess.”

Emily pointed to the floor. There was a canvas drop cloth spread over the rug to catch the falling plaster. “Pete must have brought that in with the ladder.”

The plumber was looking up into the hole in the ceiling. His curly hair was white with plaster dust. “This is the quickest way to find out where a leak is coming from.” Pete reached into the hole. “It’s wet in there.” He looked down at the children. “Did you say there’s a shower upstairs?”

“Yes,” Dick said, “but it can’t leak. There’s a new floor in it.”

“Would one of you please go up and turn on the water in the shower?” Pete asked.

Both children went into the front hall. Emily turned to Dick. “Go out front and see what else Pete has left there.”

She walked upstairs to the pink bathroom. There was a glass stall shower in the corner. Emily turned on both faucets and closed the shower door. After a few minutes steam began to drift out of the shower.

Emily ran to the top of the stairs and called down, “How long do you want me to leave the water running?”

Pete was on his way upstairs carrying a huge hammer. “I’ll turn it off now. The leak has to be from the shower,” he said. “It started raining downstairs as soon as you turned it on.”

Dick came up after him. When the plumber walked into the bathroom, Dick whispered to Emily, “Pete didn’t leave anything outside.”

“Then where did that big hammer come from?” Emily asked.

There was a loud bang from the bathroom. Emily and Dick rushed to the door to look in.

Pete was inside the stall shower. He had made a big hole in the pretty pink tiles near the floor. “There’s your problem, kids,” he said.

“It’s not the floor that’s leaking. It’s the wall. The cement inside is all soft and wet. Whoever built this shower used the wrong kind of cement.”

The broken wall looked terrible. It made Emily feel sick. Pete seemed to be knocking the house apart. Emily was sure her father wouldn’t like what was going on. He took a shower every morning. Maybe he would blame Emily for letting the plumber break it.

“Can you fix it?” Dick asked.

Pete rubbed his bristly chin. “The best way is to stuff the wall with bricks. Do you have any around the house?”

“We could look in the basement,” Dick said.

Emily led the way downstairs. Pete put the big hammer on the drop cloth in the living room.

They had to go through the kitchen to get to the basement. Pete caught sight of a box of graham crackers on the kitchen table. “I haven’t had any of those since I was a boy. They’re great with toasted marshmallows and Hershey bars.”

Dick handed him the box. “Have some. We get them all the time. I wish Mom would buy chocolate chip cookies once in a while.”

Emily had opened the door to the basement stairs. She looked back to see if Dick and the plumber were coming.

Pete was munching a cracker. “Nothing wrong with these.” He pulled a stubby yellow pencil from behind his ear and wrote something on the graham cracker box. Then he followed Dick and Emily down the stairs to the basement.

Emily and Dick and the plumber looked all over the basement. They found two rolls of garden fence, a stack of old newspapers, and a peanut butter jar with screws and nails in it. Pete looked hard at a chair with a broken leg. “That’s perfect for a cat to sharpen its claws on,” he said. “Cats like chairs better than any scratching post you can give them.”

“How are you going to fix Daddy’s shower?” Emily asked. “We don’t have any bricks.”

Pete picked up a paper bag. “What’s in here?”

“Charcoal bricks,” Dick told him.

“In a pinch I could use those,” Pete said.

Emily took the bag away from him. “Daddy needs those to cook with when we have a barbecue.”

“Never mind,” Pete said. “A man is putting a new brick porch on a house around the corner.”

“On Albemarle Road?” Dick asked.

“Yes,” Pete said. “It’s a clapboard house. A brick porch is going to look funny. Maybe I can talk him into letting me have a few bricks.”

“Why don’t you go and ask him for them now?” Emily said. “Then you can get started working on the shower.” She opened the basement door under the front steps of the house.

“I’ll take a look around for Mr. Checkers at the same time,” Pete said. He went out the door. Emily closed it behind him.

She turned to Dick. “Imagine Pete thinking he could fix the wall with charcoal! He can’t be a very good plumber.”

“But he’s such a nice guy,” Dick said. “I like him much better than Mr. Barstow.”

“So do I.” Emily put the bag of charcoal on a shelf. “I just wish he would stop breaking up the house.”

“I hope he finds Mr. Checkers. He’s probably a much better plumber than Pete.” Dick followed Emily back to the steps that led to the kitchen.

Halfway up the stairs there was a door to the backyard. Dick looked through the window on the door. “Something is climbing around in our peach tree.”

“It must be a squirrel after the peaches,” Emily told him.

“A black and white squirrel?” Dick opened the door and went out into the little garden.

Emily came out after him. She looked up into the tree in the corner of the yard.

A large black and white cat was sitting on one of the branches.

“Maybe he belongs next door,” Dick said.

“Mr. Dooley hates cats,” Emily reminded him.

“Not as much as he hates kids,” Dick told her. “I had to climb the fence to get my ball. And Mr. Dooley said if he ever caught me in his yard again I’d be sorry.”

“Here, Cat!” Emily called.

The cat hunched himself into a fluffy black and white ball. He seemed to be trying to hide behind the little green peaches.

“Maybe he doesn’t like being called *Cat*,” Dick said. “If he’s a stray I guess he doesn’t have a name. Why don’t we call him *Domino*?”

“That’s a good name for a black and white cat,” Emily said. “Come down, Domino. We’re not going to hurt you.”

The end of the cat’s tail twitched, but the rest of the cat didn’t move.

Emily stared up at the cat. Now she remembered seeing two sparrows building a nest in the tree. The leaves were so thick that

Emily couldn't see the nest. But maybe there were baby birds in it. "I think the cat's hungry, Dick," she said.

"Mom and Dad took tunafish sandwiches for their lunch," Dick said. "The can is still in the kitchen garbage pail." He went into the house and came out with the tunafish can.

Dick stood under the peach tree and held the can high over his head. "Smell this, Domino."

The black and white cat stretched out his neck. His pink nose twitched.

But still the cat stayed in the tree.

"He must be stuck," Emily said. She always had trouble climbing down from trees.

She ran back into the house. The stepladder was in the living room, right under the hole in the ceiling.

Emily grabbed hold of the ladder and folded it up. It would be easier to carry that way, she thought.

Suddenly Emily couldn't see the ladder anywhere. A chill ran down her back. Dick was right. There was something spooky going on!

She felt something in her hand. Emily looked to see what it was.

Between her thumb and forefinger she was holding a tiny aluminum ladder!

Emily didn't know why she wasn't scared anymore. Instead she was excited. She had always thought magic would be fun. And now it was happening to her.

Emily looked hard at the ladder. It was exactly like the one she had just folded. There were even two tiny red steps at the top like the big ones on Pete's ladder. But this ladder was only as tall as a book of matches.

Emily unfolded the little ladder. At once it was as big as ever.

"So that's how it works!" Emily said to herself. She folded the big ladder again. Once more she was holding a tiny one in her hand.

4

“What took you so long?” Dick asked when Emily stepped out of the back door. “And why didn’t you bring the ladder?”

“I did.” Emily walked across the yard to the peach tree. She unfolded the tiny ladder.

For a moment Dick just stared at the big ladder under the tree. Then he said, “How did you do that, Em?”

“Come here,” Emily said. When Dick was beside her, she folded the big ladder. Then she held up the little one for him to see. “Now, watch!” Emily opened the ladder. Dick looked at the ladder and then at his sister. He could see that Emily wasn’t scared. Dick grinned. “No wonder we didn’t see Pete carry it into the house!”

Emily looked up into the peach tree. The black and white cat was still on the branch. “We’ll soon have you down, Domino.” Emily started up the ladder.

“I’m scared to stand way up there on the red steps,” she said. “But I can’t reach the cat.”

Dick went up the ladder behind her. “I’ll hold you so you don’t fall off.”

Emily put her foot on the first red step. She felt dizzy, but she stepped onto the top of the ladder. Now there was a funny ringing noise in her ears.

Emily stood on tiptoe and reached up for the cat. Dick leaned against the red steps and held tight to her ankles.

The cat climbed higher in the tree.

“Come on, Domino,” Emily said. “I only want to help you get where you want to be.”

The cat pricked up his ears. He looked first at Emily and then at the ladder. His green eyes gleamed.

Emily's head was going round and round. She held on to a branch of the tree to steady herself. "You know you don't want to be in this

tree," she told the cat. "There are much nicer places to be." Emily was so dizzy now that it seemed as if Domino winked at her.

"It's no use, Dick. We'd better go down." Emily let go of the branch. The green peaches bounced up and down.

The cat jumped to the branch below him. "Meow!"

Emily took hold of him. Domino rubbed against her cheek and purred. She gently stroked his soft fur.

Dick started down the ladder. He guided Emily's feet onto the steps. She was holding the cat in her arms.

Step by step the children backed down. Dick let go of Emily's feet when they were halfway to the ground.

Emily's head was clear now. And she no longer heard the ringing noise. The bright sunshine was gone. The sun must have been behind a cloud. The air was much cooler.

Dick stepped off the ladder. Emily came after him. She put the cat down and folded the stepladder. At once it was so small that Emily put it into the pocket of her jeans to keep it safe.

Dick was looking around. "Em," he whispered. "We're not in our yard. Where are we?"

For a moment Emily couldn't see clearly. Then her eyes became used to the different light.

They were indoors. A big scale was hanging from the ceiling over their heads. Emily saw a counter loaded with all sorts of fish right in front of them.

A man in a white apron was bending over more fish piled inside a store window. His back was to Dick and Emily.

"Shh!" Emily put her fingers to her lips.

Dick pointed to a glass tank on one side of the little store. Live fish were swimming in it. The black and white cat had climbed onto the rim of the tank. He was poking his paw into the water.

Dick went quietly over to the cat. He reached out to pick him up.

Domino tried to move away from him.

Splash!

The store man turned around. "I didn't see you come in," he said to the children.

Dick was trying to pull the cat out of the fish tank.

"Just a minute," the man said. "If you want one of those fish, I'll get it for you."

"He's after the cat," Emily told him.

"I don't sell catfish." The man walked to the tank.

Dick was just pulling Domino out of the water.

The store man's face turned deep red. "Pets are not allowed in the store!" He glared at the cat.

At the sight of the man's angry face, Domino made a flying leap out of Dick's arms. He landed on the hanging scale.

“Get that cat out of here!” the fish man yelled.

Domino looked down from the scale and spat at him.

Emily held out her arms. “Domino, please come down.”

The cat pretended not to hear her.

The fish man reached up to grab the cat. Domino hissed and bared his teeth. All his fur was standing on end. His black and white tail was as bushy as a squirrel’s.

The man backed away. “If you two don’t take that cat out of my store, I’ll call the police.”

Emily wasn’t tall enough to reach the scale. She pulled the tiny ladder out of her pocket and unfolded it. At once it was a full-sized stepladder. Emily climbed up and lifted the cat off the scale.

For a moment the store man just stared at the ladder. Then he said, “You think you’re pretty funny. Well, I don’t have time for your tricks. I’ll show you what *I* think is funny!” He tried to catch hold of

Emily. She held tight to the cat and climbed all the way to the top of the ladder. The man turned around to grab Dick.

Dick slipped under his arm and jumped onto the ladder. He scrambled up after Emily. Both of them were standing on the red steps.

"I feel dizzy," Dick said.

"So do I," Emily told him. "And my ears are ringing."

Dick put his fingers in his ears. "Mine too."

"It's no use, Dick. We'd better go down." Emily called to the fish man, "Please don't be angry. We didn't mean to come into your store. All we want is to be in our own yard."

The two children started to back down the ladder.

As soon as she stepped off the red steps, Emily's head felt better. The ringing in her ears stopped.

The air was getting warmer. Emily blinked. The light was so bright now that she had to shut her eyes for a second.

Dick reached the ground first. Emily came right after him, holding the dripping cat.

"We're back in our own yard!" Dick said. "And I'm not dizzy anymore. What's going on?"

"Magic, of course." Emily put the cat on the ground. She folded the ladder and tucked it away in her pocket.

"I wonder why Pete hasn't come back," Dick said.

"Maybe he's ringing the doorbell now." Emily opened the back door. "We can't hear it when we're in the yard."

The two children rushed through the house to the front door. But there was no little plumber waiting on the stoop outside.

They went into the living room. Emily took the ladder out of her pocket. She opened it and set it under the hole in the ceiling, where Pete had left it.

Dick looked at the ladder. "Pete didn't go anywhere when he was on the ladder."

"He wasn't standing on the red steps," Emily said.

Dick thought about this. "You're right, Em. That's where the magic is. You feel it as soon as you step on them."

Emily sat down on the drop cloth Pete had spread over the carpet. "I think I know why the ladder brought us home to our yard."

"Why?" Dick asked.

“Because I was standing on a red step when I told the store man we only wanted to be in our own yard,” Emily said.

“You mean the ladder takes you where you say you want to be?” Dick said.

Emily nodded. “But I can’t figure out why the ladder took us to the fish store.”

Dick started to laugh. “When you were on top of the ladder trying to get Domino out of the tree, you told him you wanted to help him get where *he* wanted to be.”

Emily thought about this. “He must have been hungry.”

“And you know how cats love fish,” Dick said. “I’ll bet that nutty cat would rather be in a fish store than anywhere else in the world!”

Emily was thinking hard. “I was just trying to get Domino to come down from the tree. I never thought he’d understand what I said.”

“He’s no ordinary cat,” Dick told her. “I wish we could keep him.”

“So do I. But you know Daddy is allergic to cat fur. It makes him sick if there’s a cat in the house.” Emily got up and walked to the window. “I don’t see Pete anywhere. He’s not using his ladder. It’s a shame to let it go to waste, now that we know how it works.”

“Gee, what a great idea!” Dick said. “It’s my turn to say where we go—I’m hungry. It must be nearly lunchtime. Why don’t we have a picnic?”

“We’d better hurry.” Emily ran into the kitchen. Dick came after her. He found a shopping bag folded up among the paper bags in the cupboard on the back stairs.

Emily packed a loaf of bread and a jar of peanut butter in the shopping bag. She put in two bananas and the box of graham crackers.

Dick added a knife from the kitchen drawer. “To spread the peanut butter.”

Emily pulled two paper cups from the kitchen dispenser and took a container of milk out of the refrigerator. She tucked in a couple of paper napkins. “All set.”

Dick and Emily went back to the living room and looked out at the street. Two girls had tied a rope to a fence three doors away. They were trying to jump double-Dutch. The retired fireman was standing in his usual place on the corner. A lady was walking a frizzy dog. But there was no sign of Pete the plumber.

“All clear.” Dick ran to the ladder and climbed to the very top. “Come on, Em.”

Emily started up the ladder. The handles of the shopping bag were looped over her arm. “Where are we going?”

“It’s a surprise,” Dick said.

Emily climbed up until she was standing on the red step below Dick. At once her head began to spin, and there was that ringing in

her ears. Emily was so dizzy she was afraid she'd fall off the ladder.

Dick was sitting on the top of the ladder, holding on with both hands. "Ready, Em?"

"Ready!" Emily felt something soft and furry rub against her ankle.

Dick said something to the ladder but Emily was looking at her feet and didn't hear what it was. Two green eyes were looking up at her. Domino was next to her on the red step.

Emily scooped up the black and white cat and started down the ladder. The shopping bag brushed against her leg. A cool breeze blew through her hair. Emily heard the sound of rushing water.

She went two steps farther down.

"Meow!" The cat tried to jump out of her arms.

Dick turned to look down. "How did that cat get here?"

"We must have left the door to the yard open," Emily said. "I guess he's awfully hungry. Maybe he thought we were going back to the fish store. I wish we could find a home for him."

"Meow!" Domino tried to climb back up the ladder,

Emily held him tight and backed onto the step below. "Dick, there's water down here. My feet are getting splashed."

“Cats hate water,” Dick said. “Give him to me. Then you can take off your shoes.”

Emily handed the cat to her brother. “Hang on to this, too.” She gave him the shopping bag.

Emily pulled off her sneakers and tied the laces together. She hung the shoes around her neck and stuffed her socks into her pockets. Then she rolled up the legs of her jeans. “I can take Domino now.”

Dick gave her the cat and the shopping bag. He began to take off his shoes. Emily backed down the ladder and stepped into water up to her knees. She felt stones under her bare feet.

The ladder was standing in a rocky stream. Thick slabs of rock made a wall on one side. Deep woods grew close to the shores. In the distance Emily could see the tops of mountains rising above the trees.

The stream tumbled and splashed around the rocks. Just before it came to an iron bridge, it dropped in a foaming waterfall.

“What a beautiful place!” Emily held the cat and the shopping bag as high as she could to keep them from getting wet.

Dick was off the ladder now. He had slung his shoes over his shoulder. “Don’t you remember Wangum Falls?”

Emily put the cat and the shopping bag on a flat rock in the middle of the stream. She climbed onto the rock and sat down. Domino crawled into her lap.

Dick folded the ladder. At once it was not much bigger than a paper clip. “I’ll take care of this.” Dick dropped the ladder into the pocket of his shirt. Then he scrambled onto the rock beside his sister. “Look, Em.” Dick pointed to the iron bridge. “There’s the road we

drove over last summer. I wanted to explore this place then, but Dad was in too much of a rush to stop."

"We were late," Emily reminded him. "Mother had lunch ready at the cottage."

Dick was staring at a dark crack between two rocks along the shore. "Em, what do you think that is?"

Emily looked hard at the rocks. "Oh, Dick! Do you suppose it's a cave?"

"Let's go see." Dick climbed off the rock into the water. "Maybe we can picnic in it."

"I can't carry both the cat and the shopping bag," Emily told him.

Dick reached for the cat. "I'll take Domino."

The children waded through the swirling water. When they reached the shore, Emily stood on her toes to shove the shopping bag into the crack in the rocks. She pulled herself up after it.

The crack was just wide enough for Emily to fit through. She peeked into it. “It’s a cave, all right.”

She lay down on her stomach in the crack and held out her arms. Dick handed the cat up to her.

Domino took a look at the crack in the rock. He perked up his ears and slipped away from Emily to run into the cave.

Emily grabbed Dick’s hand to help him climb up the rock. Then she squeezed through the crack.

Dick came after her. He looked around. “Isn’t this great!”

It was cool in the cave. The big rocks leaned toward each other to make a pointed roof A soft green light flickered through the places where the rocks didn't quite meet.

The floor was rough and uneven. Right in the center there was a dent. Rainwater had come through the crack in the roof and made a little pool there. The cat crouched beside it, looking down into the water.

"You won't find any fish here, Domino," Emily said.

Dick walked over to the pool. He stared into the shadows in the water. "There's something in there, Em. It looks like a lobster."

Emily got down on her hands and knees beside the pool. "That's a crayfish. It does look like a little lobster. There's another one. And what's hiding behind that stone?"

Dick leaned way over and reached into the water to move the stone. A small black fish swam across the pool. “Hey, Em, this fish has whiskers.”

Emily laughed. “A catfish for Domino!”

The cat flattened his ears and hunched his shoulders. The end of his black and white tail twitched. He got up and walked away from the pool.

Emily got to her feet. She went over to stroke the cat. “I’m sorry, Domino. I didn’t mean to make fun of you.”

Dick opened the shopping bag. “Time for lunch.”

The children sat cross-legged on the stone floor. Emily took the bread and the knife out of the shopping bag. Dick unscrewed the top of the peanut butter jar.

Emily spread peanut butter on a slice of bread. She started to put another slice on top to make a sandwich.

“If that’s for me,” Dick said, “I’ll take one piece of bread at a time. I like to taste the peanut butter.”

“Doesn’t it stick to the roof of your mouth?” Emily handed him the bread and peanut butter. She peeled a banana and began to eat it.

Domino sat beside Emily and watched every bite she took. She offered him some peanut butter. He took one sniff and turned his back to her.

“I didn’t know you were coming with us, Domino,” Emily said, “or I’d have brought something for you to eat.”

Dick opened the box of crackers. He bit into one. “That’s funny.”

“What is?” Emily asked.

“This doesn’t taste like a graham cracker at all,” Dick said.

“We had some out of that box yesterday,” Emily told him. “There wasn’t anything wrong with them.”

“I didn’t say there was anything *wrong* with it.” Dick looked at the cracker he was holding. “The light’s not very bright in here. But this doesn’t even look like a graham cracker.”

Emily felt in the box for a cracker. She sniffed it. “Smells like coconut.” She took a bite. “M-m-m, a macaroon!”

Dick was nibbling his cracker. “This one tastes like a chocolate chip cookie.”

Emily picked up the graham cracker box. She carried it to a place where the sunlight streamed through a crack in the roof “There’s some writing on the box.”

“Pete wrote on it with that pencil he sticks behind his ear,” Dick reminded her. “What does it say?”

Emily looked at the box. There was a line drawn through *Graham Crackers*.

“Cookies,” she read. “More magic!”

10

Emily pulled a stubby yellow pencil out of the pocket of her jeans. “I found this on the kitchen table when I was packing our picnic.”

“That looks like Pete’s pencil. He must have dropped it. Let me have it for a minute, Em.” Dick took the pencil and wrote FISH in big letters on a strip of banana peel.

The peel flipped out of Dick’s hand and began to flop around on the floor. Now it had round eyes and a fan-shaped tail. A second later there were shiny scales on the slippery peel.

“Hey, Em!” Dick yelled. “It did turn into a fish!”

“Meow!” The cat leaped across the cave toward the fish.

“Stop it, Domino!” Emily grabbed the cat. “Dick, get that fish out of here.”

Dick chased the fish around the cave. Whenever he tried to pick it up, it slipped out of his hands.

“Hold Domino.” Emily gave the cat to her brother. She used the shopping bag to trap the fish. Then she went out of the cave and dumped the fish into the stream.

Emily came back with the empty shopping bag. “Now, what did you do with the pencil?”

Dick put the cat down. Domino turned his back to Emily and started to clean himself.

They looked all over the cave. Dick found the pencil wrapped up in a curl of banana peel. “I just wanted to give Domino some lunch. I didn’t know the fish would be alive.” Dick scratched his head. “How do you spell *sardine*, Em?” Emily came over to help. “Let’s try it with one little piece.”

Dick used the butter knife they had brought from home to cut the banana peel into narrow strips.

“I’m going to make sure this one isn’t alive.” Emily wrote *canned sardine* in small neat letters on one of the strips.

“It sure smells like a sardine,” Dick said.

Emily took the little strip of peel over to the cat. “I know you’d rather play with a live fish, Domino. But see if you can make do with this.”

Domino’s pink nose started to quiver. He stopped cleaning his left shoulder.

Emily put the sardine on the floor of the cave in front of him. The cat ate it slowly. When every bit was gone, he looked up at Emily. “Meow!”

She wrote on another strip of banana peel and gave it to the cat. Domino worked his way through four sardines before he was finished. Then he licked his whiskers and walked over to Emily to give her leg a friendly bump with his furry head.

Emily and Dick were all done with their lunch now, too.

"If we wrote *licorice* on the leftover strips of banana peel," Dick said, "we could save it and eat it later."

Emily thought this was a good idea. But they kept spelling *licorice* wrong and wasted all the banana peel.

"We should have written *taffy*," Emily said. "It's not as good as licorice, but at least we can spell it." She put the pencil back into her pocket. "You said you wanted to explore this place, Dick. Now's our chance."

Emily put the jar of peanut butter and the knife back into the shopping bag along with the empty milk container and the rest of the trash from their picnic. Dick picked up the cat.

They squeezed through the crack in the rock to the open air.

Emily held on to Domino and the shopping bag while Dick climbed down the rock to the stream. Then she handed him the cat and slid down to join him.

They were up to their knees in the water. It splashed around their legs.

"Meow!" Domino tried to climb onto Dick's head to get away from the spray.

Emily grabbed the cat and held him up in the air. She waded across the stream. Dick followed her.

The trees grew right down to the edge of the water here.

"Let's go for a walk," Emily said. "Put your sneakers on, Dick."

Dick sat down in the shadow of a bush. His shoes were still slung over his shoulder. Dick pulled them into his lap. The laces were tied together. "I can't get the knots out."

Emily sat beside her brother to untangle the knots in his shoelaces. Domino poked at the laces with his paw.

Crack! A twig snapped in the underbrush.

"Freeze!" Emily whispered.

A slender deer stepped out of the woods and looked around. The children sat so still that the deer didn't know they were there. She took a long drink from the stream. Then she flapped her white tail like a flag.

Two little speckled fawns came out into the open. They went to join their mother.

Dick and Emily held their breath. Domino stared at the deer without blinking.

The mother deer kept watch while the two fawns drank from the stream. Then all three bounded back into the forest.

Emily went back to working on the knots in Dick's shoelaces. When they were untangled, she handed him the shoes and started to put on her own.

"Look, Em." Dick pointed to a little path that led into the woods.

Emily got to her feet. "Maybe it's a deer trail. Let's follow it and see if we can find out where they went." She picked up the cat and started down the path. Dick came after her.

Tap, tap, tap.

Emily looked up. A little black and white bird with a red patch on his head was pecking at the bark of an old tree.

Emily could feel the cat's muscles harden under his soft fur. His eyes gleamed.

"Stop it, Domino! You're not hungry now," Emily said.

It was dark in the woods. But here and there the sunlight came through the leaves and made bright patches on the soft ground.

A chipmunk squeaked and ran across the path. Domino tried to jump out of Emily's arms. She held him tight.

"What's that on the tree over there?" Dick asked.

"It looks like a sign." Emily left the path and pushed through a clump of blueberry bushes to get to the tree. Dick was right behind her.

"No hunting," Dick read. "Do you hear that, Domino?"

Emily was reading the small print. "It says *No trespassing*, too. And if they catch anybody in these woods, they fine them or put them in jail. We'd better get out of here, Dick."

"Anyway, it's time we went home." Dick reached into his shirt pocket.

“Hurry up,” Emily said. “Open the ladder.”

Dick went on feeling around in his pocket. Emily looked at him. “What’s the matter?”

Dick looked sick. “The ladder must have fallen out of my pocket. It’s gone, Em.”

12

A blue jay screamed overhead. Emily held tight to the cat. But she got down on her hands and knees beside Dick to help him look for the ladder.

There was no sign of it among the pine needles on the ground.

"The ladder's so small," Emily said, "we'll never find it. We'd better get out of these woods before anybody sees us here."

"Listen!" Dick said.

Emily heard the motor of a car.

The road can't be far away. Dick started in the direction of the sound.

Emily went after him, carrying the cat. They crossed a ridge and found themselves on a narrow road. Huge trees grew on each side of it. The branches curved over the road to make a leafy tunnel. There were no cars in sight now.

“Nobody can fine us or put us in jail if we stay on the road,” Dick said.

Emily was scared. She knew they were a long way from home. But there was no sense in letting Dick know she was afraid. They walked along the road under the arching branches. Domino seemed to get heavier all the time.

A wind was blowing through the trees now. The sunlight no longer flickered down between the leaves. Far off they heard a rumble of thunder. Emily knew it wasn’t safe to be in the woods during a storm.

All at once the road came out of the woods onto an iron bridge. Under the bridge the water tumbled and splashed.

“We’re right back at Wangum Falls.” Dick walked onto the bridge. “There’s our cave, Em.” He pointed to the wall of rocks on one side of the stream. “We can see it from here.”

“But we couldn’t see *those* from the cave,” Emily told him.

Dick looked to see what she was talking about.

There were big signs on each side of the bridge, like the sign they had found on the tree.

"You're not allowed to wade in the stream," Emily said. "It's a good thing nobody saw us."

The sky was very dark now. A streak of lightning zigzagged across the clouds. A second later the children heard a loud clap of thunder.

Emily felt a drop of rain on her nose.

Another splashed on her cheek. Domino jumped out of her arms and raced across the bridge.

Emily and Dick ran after him.

The cat left the road and leaped to the rocks along the stream.

Emily looked at the big signs. She knew she'd be in trouble if anyone saw her down by the stream. But she couldn't let Domino get lost in the woods. Then he'd *have* to eat the birds and chipmunks.

"There's a car coming," Dick said. "Somebody will see us."

Emily was already making her way down the steep bank. Dick followed her.

Domino was leaping from one rock to another along the stream. The two children chased after him.

There was another flash of lightning and a bang of thunder. The rain was coming down in white sheets.

Domino had jumped onto a rock in the stream. The water swirled all around him.

Emily waded into the water, shoes and all. She grabbed the cat.

"Hey, Em," Dick yelled. "Look where we are."

13

Emily turned to look at her brother. He was standing right by the crack in the rock that led to the cave. “Come on up here, Em.”

She held the cat in her arms and waded to the rock. Dick lay on his stomach and reached down for Domino. Emily handed up the cat and climbed after him.

Dick carried Domino through the crack. And Emily squeezed into the cave behind them.

It felt like coming home.

Rain dripped through the open places in the roof. Now and then a flash of lightning lit the dim cave for a second. Dick and Emily sat close to the walls, out of the way of the drips. Dick put the shopping bag on the ground near them.

The legs of Emily’s jeans were soaking wet. So were her shoes and socks. Domino was wet, too, but he ran over to the pool in the center of the cave.

“Take a look at that crazy cat,” Dick said. “He’s fishing again!”

For a while Domino just stared into the pool. Then he poked in a black and white paw. He pulled it out almost at once and started to shake it. “Meow!”

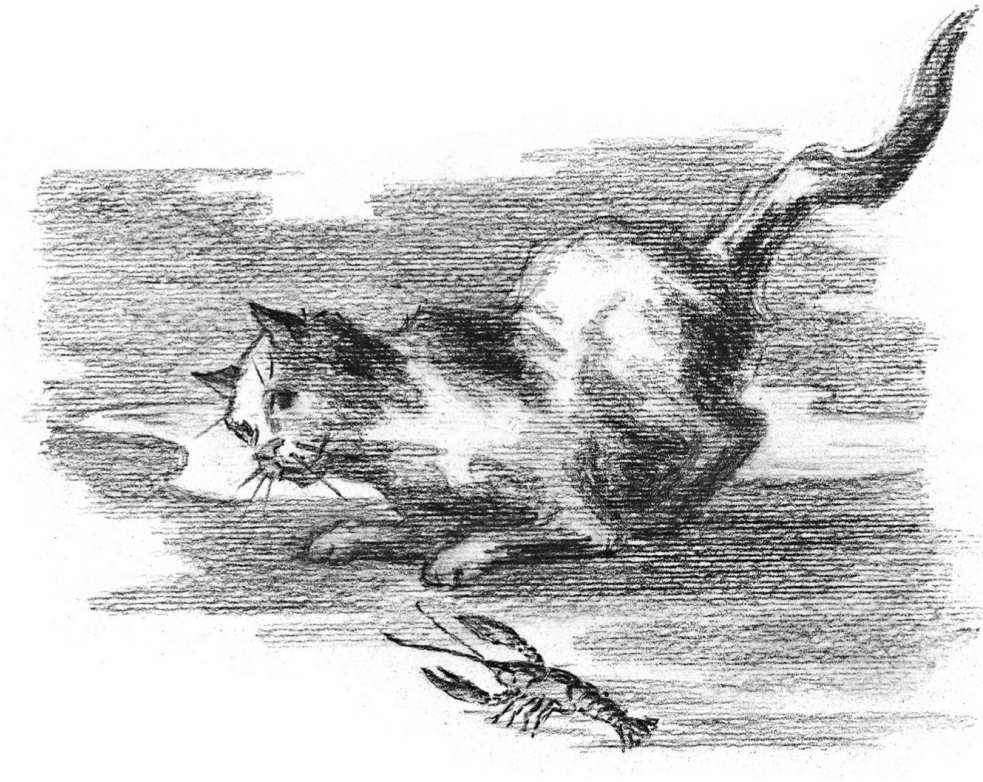
“There’s something stuck on his paw.” Dick ran over to see what if was. “A crayfish.”

Emily went to help. The crayfish was pinching Domino’s furry paw with one of its sharp claws.

“Watch out it doesn’t grab you, Em!” Dick went to the shopping bag. He took out the butter knife and brought it over to pry the crayfish’s claw open. “I’ll have you free in a moment, Domino.”

Dick wiggled the knife in the claw. The crayfish opened its claw, and Domino pulled his paw out. Dick put down the knife, picked up the cat, and began to stroke him.

Emily looked at the crayfish. “There’s something in its other claw.”



The crayfish was crawling back toward the pool of water.

Suddenly Domino twisted out of Dick’s arms and jumped toward the pool. He reached the water before the crayfish did and crouched on the edge. “Meow!”

“He’s trying to tell us something,” Emily said.

The cat was moving back and forth in front of the pool. He seemed to be trying to keep the crayfish from getting into the water.

Emily picked up the butter knife. She pried open the other claw of the crayfish. Something small and shiny dropped onto the floor of the cave. Dick picked it up.

Domino stood up and stretched.

Splash! The crayfish dived into the water and disappeared under a stone. “We don’t want to lose this.” Emily put the knife back into the shopping bag. “We’re in enough trouble already.”

Dick was looking at the little object the crayfish had dropped.

“What is it?” Emily asked.

“It’s so dark in here I can’t be sure,” he said. “And anyway it seems too good to be true.”

Emily felt her heart pound inside her. She was so excited she could hardly speak. “Give it to me.”

Dick handed her the little shiny thing. She held it up.

A flash of lightning lit the cave. Now the children could see that what they hoped was really true.

Emily was holding the little stepladder in her hand.

14

“The ladder must have fallen into the pool when I was looking at the catfish,” Dick said. “Anyway, now that we’ve got it back, let’s go home.”

Emily looked at the low roof of the cave. “The ladder’s too tall for us to open it here. And we might be struck by lightning if we took it outside.”

“The cave’s wide enough to open the ladder sideways on the floor,” Dick told her.

“But then we couldn’t go *up* to the red steps,” Emily pointed out.

Dick thought for a minute. “Maybe just touching the red steps works the magic.”

“It’s worth a try,” Emily said. She laid the little ladder on its side near the pool and opened it while it was still on the ground.

At once a full-size ladder stretched from one wall of the cave to the other. It went right over the pool of water in the center.

Dick picked up the cat. He walked over to the end of the ladder and got up to stand on the side of the red step there. Emily went to get the shopping bag. She stood on the side of the step next to her brother.

“We want to go home,” Dick said. Then he hopped off the ladder. “We’re still in the cave, Em. I guess the magic doesn’t work when the ladder’s on its side.” He put the cat on the ground.

Emily stepped down. “Help me fold it up, Dick.”

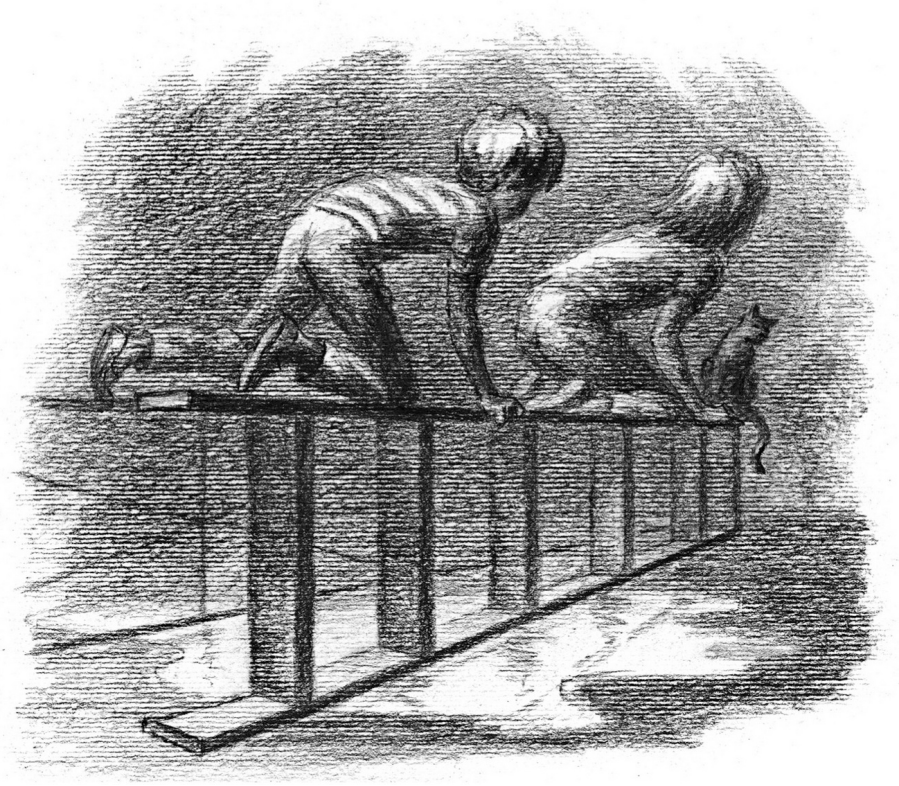
“Meow!” Domino ran to the other end of the ladder. He jumped onto the edge and tiptoed along it, crossing the pool as if he were on a bridge. When he reached the red steps, the cat sat down on the side of the ladder.

Emily looked at him. Domino was swaying, and his green eyes were crossed. “He’s dizzy, Dick! Hurry up! He’s showing us how to work the magic!”

Emily went to the opposite end of the ladder and crawled along. The ladder creaked and shook. Emily nearly fell into the pool of water when she had to cross it. The handles of the shopping bag were looped over her arm, and the bag flapped against the ladder.

At last Emily got to the first red step. She felt it with her fingers, and bells started to ring in her ears. She crawled over to the cat.

Emily took hold of the red step at the end of the ladder. Now the cave was turning like a merry-go-round.



Dick started along the ladder. He had even more trouble than Emily. The ladder was shaking as if it would fall apart at any moment.

It seemed an age before Dick reached the red step next to Emily. “Try it now, Em.”

Emily closed her eyes and whispered, “Home, please take us home!”

She opened her eyes. “Dick,” she said, “I think we have to go back all the way across the ladder.”

“Yipe!” Dick started crawling backward the way he had come.

Emily waited until her brother was almost to the end of the ladder before she started to move. Then she backed slowly over the pool of water.

Domino was still crouching on the side of the red step. Without any warning, he made a mad dash and bumped into Emily. The ladder tipped over and threw Emily and the cat on top of Dick.

They rolled over and over on the living room rug.

15

Emily let go of the shopping bag. She stood up and looked around the room. The canvas drop cloth was still spread on the rug under the hole Pete had made in the ceiling. “We’d better put the ladder back where it was. Give me a hand with it, Dick.”

Dick got to his feet. He helped Emily set the ladder upright.

“Pete’s probably waiting on the front stoop.” Dick ran to the door. “He’s not there.”

“Maybe he came back and went away again. We’ve been gone a long time.” Emily moved the ladder onto the drop cloth. She stumbled over something. It was the big hammer Pete had used to break the wall of the shower.

“Let me take that out of your way.” Dick tugged at the hammer. “It’s heavier than I thought.” He looked at the wooden handle. “There are some numbers written here.”

Emily set the ladder under the hole in the ceiling. She came over to see what Dick was talking about.

28″ was marked in pencil on the handle.

“That means twenty-eight inches,” Emily said.

Dick looked at the hammer. “I remember now. We learned that in school. This hammer looks about twenty-eight inches long. Hey, Em, you know what I think?”

Emily pulled the yellow pencil stub out of her pocket. There was an eraser on the end of it.

As soon as she touched the pencil marks with the eraser, they vanished. Then Emily wrote *10″* on the handle. At once the hammer was only ten inches long.

Dick picked up the little hammer. “Now we know where Pete got the big hammer,” he said.

“Yes. And I’d better make it big again before he gets back.” Emily erased the numbers she had written.

“Wait a minute!” Dick put the little hammer on the floor. “I don’t want to be holding this when you change it back.”

Emily bent over and wrote *28″* on the wooden handle. Once again the hammer was too big for them to lift.

“Where’s Domino?” Dick asked.

Emily picked up the shopping bag. “That reminds me. Go shut the back door.” She walked into the kitchen and took the peanut butter jar and the graham cracker box out of the shopping bag.

She used the eraser on Pete’s pencil to remove the writing on the box. Her mother would ask a lot of questions if she found cookies in it. Emily opened the box and sniffed. The smell of graham crackers met her nose. She put the pencil stub away in her pocket.

Dick had gone down the stairs to the door to the yard. Now he came back into the kitchen. “I shut the door, but I didn’t see Domino in the yard.”

“Maybe he’s still in the house,” Emily said. “We have to make sure he’s out.”

“It wouldn’t make Dad sick if we kept the cat in the yard,” Dick said. “We could build a kennel for him.”

Emily didn’t think Domino would want to live in a kennel, but she didn’t feel like arguing with Dick.

“I’ll look in the basement,” Dick said. “You check around here.”

Emily searched the kitchen and dining room. She looked under the living room sofa and in the hall closet. She didn’t find the cat.

Dick came up from the basement. “Do you think he could have gone up to the bedrooms?”

Emily ran up the stairs. Dick was right behind her.

The children looked in their bedrooms. Then they both tiptoed into their parents’ big room at the front of the house.

The sun streamed through the tall bay windows onto the wide bed. The wet black and white cat was curled up in a patch of sunlight on their mother's pillow.

"Domino!" Emily yelled. "Get off there!"

The cat opened his eyes. Dick walked over to pick him up. But Domino made a flying leap to the floor and ran out of the room.

Emily and Dick chased after him.

16

Emily and Dick rushed out of their parents' room into the hall. Domino was already out of sight. They looked into the pink bathroom. The cat was slipping through the open door of the stall shower.

The children ran into the bathroom. They were just in time to see the end of Domino's black and white tail disappear into the jagged hole in the wall.

Dick got down on his hands and knees on the shower floor. He looked into the hole. "It's like a little tunnel." Dick stood up. "What did you do with Pete's pencil, Em?"

Emily took it out of her pocket. "Why?"

"I want to try something." Dick took the pencil out of her hand. Emily saw him write *3 ½″* on the back of his arm.

The pencil clattered to the floor. Emily couldn't see Dick anywhere. But when she bent over to pick up the pencil, there was a tiny boy standing in the middle of the shower stall.

"Hey, Em, it worked!" the boy said. It was Dick's voice, but not nearly as loud as usual. "Now I can find out where the tunnel goes." He ran over to the hole in the wall and stepped into it.

"Dick, come back!" Emily called after him.

There was no answer.

Emily crouched down to look into the hole. It was very dark inside. "Dick, can you hear me?"

Dick didn't answer. Emily wished she hadn't let him have the pencil. It would be terrible if anything happened to her little brother. She had to get him to come back.

Emily went to her room to get the little red flashlight she kept under her pillow. She pushed it way down into the pocket of her jeans. Then she ran back to the bathroom and stepped into the shower stall.

She stared at the magic pencil and thought hard. Emily liked being taller than her brother. She wrote *4″* on her arm.

At once the pencil stub was almost as big as she was. Emily had to drop it. She pulled her flashlight out of her pocket and turned it on. Emily took a deep breath and stepped into the tunnel.

Her shoes and socks and the legs of her jeans were still damp. Maybe I should have written *dry* on them with Pete's pencil, she thought.

But it was too late now. Anyway, Emily didn't know just how the pencil would work. She wondered if Pete knew for sure.

At first the tunnel went through soft wet cement. Emily's feet sank into it with each step. The flashlight gave just enough light to keep

her from bumping into the mushy walls. She thought of Dick running through the tunnel in the dark. Emily tried to go faster.

In a little while the floor was dry, but it was very rough underfoot. The way was crooked now. Emily had to duck under slats of wood and squeeze between chunks of plaster.

The darkness was fading into a kind of twilight. Up ahead there was light.

Emily came to the end of the tunnel. She stepped out onto a hard floor. It was made of the biggest tiles Emily had ever seen.

In front of her there was a huge metal paw like the foot of a lion. It was holding up an enormous old-fashioned bathtub.

Emily had walked into the bathroom of the house next door.

17

A dim light came from a dirty skylight in the bathroom ceiling. Emily turned off her flashlight and put it back into her pocket.

She didn't like being in Mr. Dooley's house. It would be awful if he saw her there.

But where was Dick? Emily walked all around the huge room. She didn't see him anywhere.

The bathroom door was open. Emily went out into a hall. It was a lot like the hall in her own house. But the floor here wasn't shiny the way it was at home. Mr. Dooley didn't wash it very often, Emily thought.

A cockroach ran along the baseboard. Emily hated roaches. This one was bigger than her feet. She caught sight of a giant spider dangling by a thread from the ceiling.

Emily walked toward the stairs at the end of the hall. They were very big now that she was so small.

Someone was lying face-down on the top step. Emily's heart seemed to stop for an instant.

It was her brother!

She ran over and kneeled down beside him. "Dick, are you hurt?"

He turned his head to look at her. "Em!"

"Why are you lying down?" Emily asked.

"I'm trying to figure out the best way to get down these stairs," Dick told her.

"Why do you want to go downstairs?" Emily wanted to know.

"Domino ran down there," Dick said. "Mr. Dooley will do something terrible to him if he catches him. You know how he hates

cats."

Emily saw that each of the stair steps was taller than she was. She pointed to the baseboard that slanted down the wall beside the stairs. "Why don't we slide down?"

"We'll have to hang our legs over the steps and go down sideways," Dick said.

Emily climbed onto the board. She grabbed Dick's hand to pull him up beside her.

They started sliding, using their hands as brakes. Halfway down they slipped off the board onto a little landing. Dick jumped to his feet and ran to climb onto the baseboard that went the rest of the way down the stairs. Emily came after him.

They began to slide faster. At the bottom of the stairs, Dick shot off the board onto the floor. Emily fell on top of him.

The two children stood up. They were in a dark hall. Dick rubbed his elbow. "Ouch! I landed on my funny bone."

"Sh-sh!" Emily pulled Dick back against the wall.

Someone was coming down the hall. But all Emily and Dick could see were two huge bedroom slippers walking toward them.

The slippers went right by and walked into the living room.

"That's Mr. Dooley," Dick said. "We'd better keep out of his sight."

The children tiptoed the other way down the hall.

They went past a gloomy dining room. There were six heavy chairs. A bowl of dusty wax fruit was set in the middle of the big table. The room looked as if nobody ever ate there.

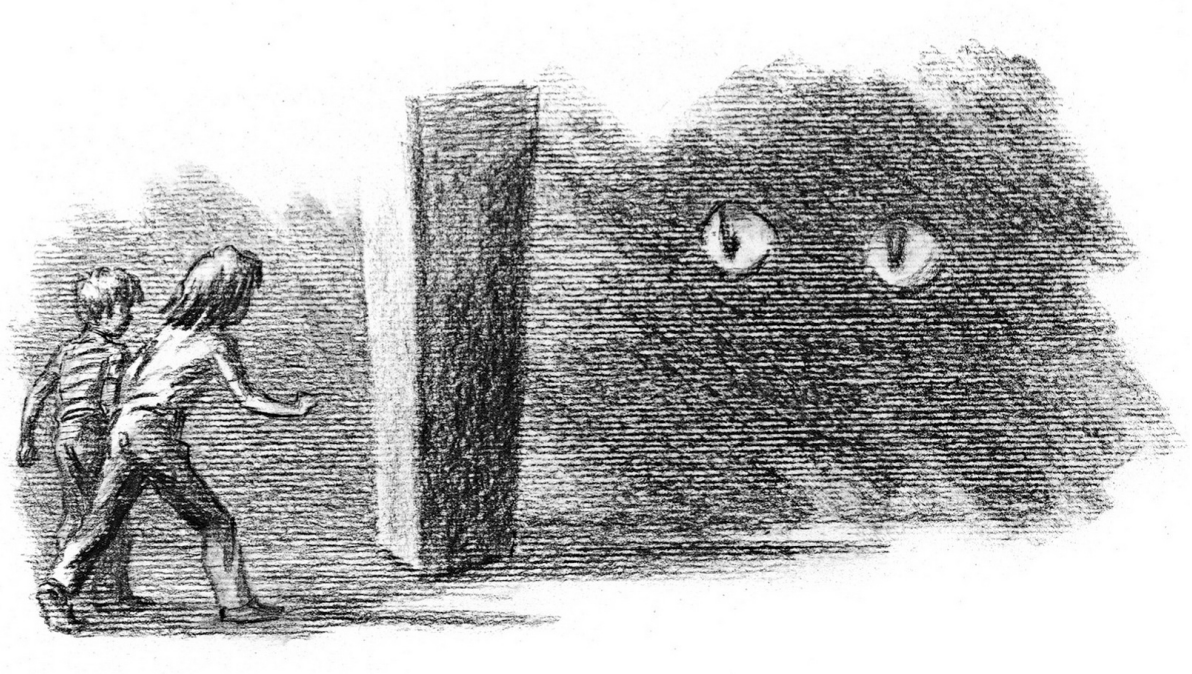
At the end of the hall they came to a swinging door. Dick and Emily pushed as hard as they could. The door swung just wide enough to let them squeeze into the kitchen at the back of the house.

The kitchen smelled of stale coffee grounds and bacon grease.

Dick looked up at the grimy window. "Mr. Dooley can see into our yard from there. I'll bet he's always spying on us."

Emily had the creepy feeling that someone was watching them now. She grabbed Dick's arm. "Look!"

Two enormous eyes were shining in the dark shadows under the kitchen table.



16

It was a summer day. But Emily felt cold all over.

She was afraid to move. She just kept staring into the shadows. Little by little her eyes became used to the gloom. She could make out the shape of a huge cat crouched under the kitchen table.

It was Domino! His sharp teeth gleamed. And his claws looked like long knives. Emily was not much bigger than a mouse now. And she knew exactly how a mouse must feel.

Domino crawled out from under the table. His pink nose twitched. Emily held her breath.

Dick reached up and tickled the cat's chin. "Smell my hand, Domino. Don't you know me?"

The cat pricked up his ears. He began to purr. The noise sounded so loud that Emily expected Mr. Dooley to come rushing into his kitchen to see what was going on there.

"Sh-sh, Domino." Emily was ashamed to have been afraid of the big cat. She gently stroked his soft chest.

The cat arched his back and stretched. He looked around the kitchen.

There was a bowl of leftover stew on the table. Domino jumped up and walked over to the bowl.

He took one sniff and drew back. Then he shook his paw and leaped to the floor. The next minute the cat marched to the swinging door, butted it open with his head, and slipped out of the kitchen.

"Hurry, Em! We've got to keep Domino away from the living room. Mr. Dooley's in there." Dick ran to the door. Together Dick and Emily pushed their way into the hall.

Domino had already reached the dining room door. He stopped to look inside. Emily and Dick raced down the hall toward him.

The children's feet pattered on the bare floor. The cat turned his head to see where the sound was coming from. He crouched, ready to spring. His sharp claws were curved and ready.

"It's us, Domino!" Emily yelled.

The cat yawned. He pulled his claws back inside his soft paws.

"If you yell like that, Em," Dick whispered, "Mr. Dooley will hear you."

"Domino," Emily said, "how about giving us a ride?"

"That's a great idea, Em." Dick walked over to the black and white cat and rubbed his furry side.

Domino lay flat on the floor. Dick climbed onto his back. "Come on, Em."

Emily ran over and scrambled up behind her brother. She lay on her stomach and held tight to the cat's fur.

Dick sat astride Domino's neck, as if he were riding a horse. "We're better off here where he won't think we're something to eat. Giddyap, Domino!"

The cat leaped to his feet and went tearing down the hall. Dick bounced up and down. Emily was afraid that at any minute she'd slide off onto the floor.

"Whoa!" Dick tried to stop the cat. But he was too late.

Domino galloped into the living room.

19

Emily lay flat on the cat's back. She tried to hide in his black and white fur. Dick leaned against Domino's neck and pretended to be part of the cat.

Domino ran into Mr. Dooley's living room and sat down on the rug.

Dick and Emily expected Mr. Dooley to let out a yell and come rushing over to them.

There was no sound except the loud ticking of the tall clock in the corner of the room.

Emily looked around. The sunlight filtered through dirty windows onto the rug. All the furniture was old and worn. A newspaper was spread open on the sofa where someone had been reading it. And there was a cup and saucer on the coffee table. But no one was in the room now.

"Hey, Em, look at that!" Dick pointed to a table placed where the sunlight was not too strong.

Emily saw a big shiny glass tank on the table. The tank was full of water, and all sorts of plants were growing there. Little bright-colored fish were swimming in and out among the green stems.

Domino got up from the rug. He marched over to the table.

The cat looked up to see how far he had to jump. Then he gave one spring and landed right beside the glass tank. Domino stood on his hind legs and put his front paws on the rim.

"Now we know why Mr. Dooley doesn't like cats," Dick said.

"Leave the fish alone, Domino," Emily begged.

The cat didn't seem to hear her. He rested his chin on the edge of the tank and looked down into the water.

"Come on, Domino," Dick said. "Let's get out of here before Mr. Dooley comes back."

Domino didn't move. He seemed to have forgotten everything but the fish.

"I don't think he remembers that we're here," Emily said.

"I'll remind him." Dick climbed up the cat's neck onto his head. He grabbed hold of the edge of the cat's ear and leaned over to shout into it.

Domino felt something on his ear. He turned his head to one side and gave it a shake.

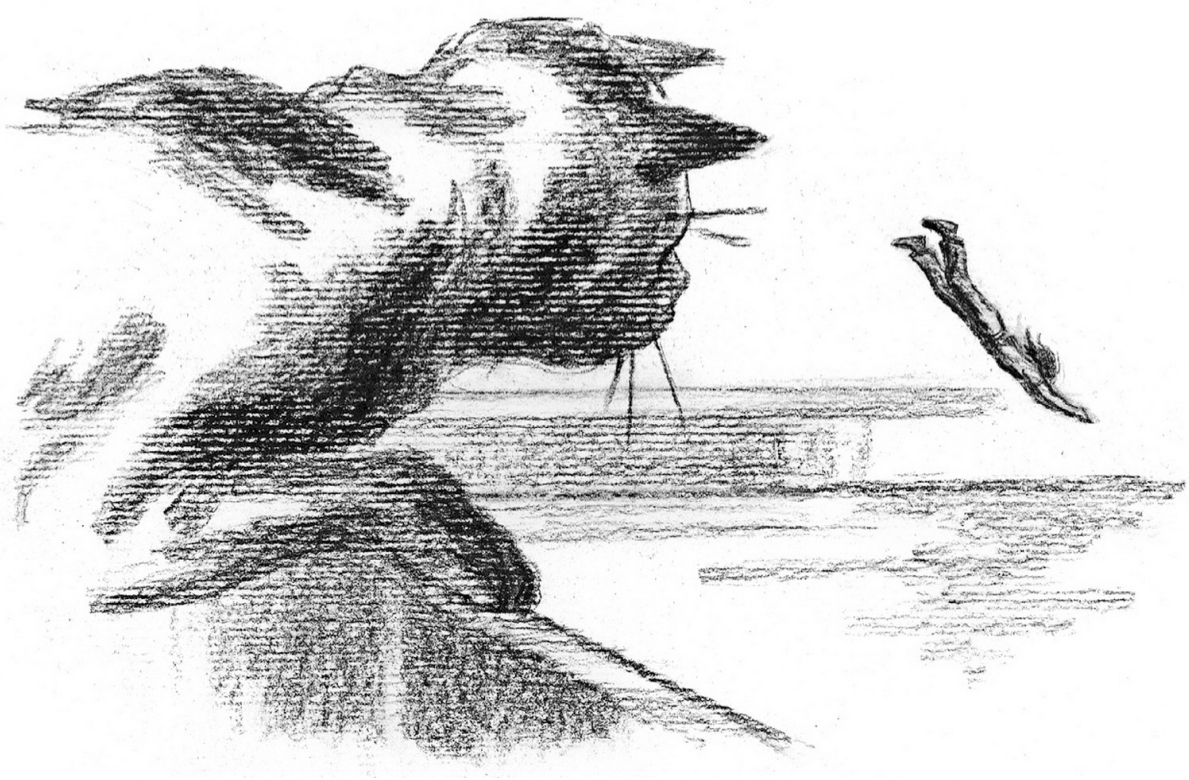
Dick started sliding. He made a grab for one of the cat's whiskers. But it slipped through his fingers. Splash!

Dick fell head over heels into the fish tank. Emily saw him struggling among the floating green plants on the surface of the water. A moment later he sank under them and disappeared.

Emily could swim better than Dick. She had to save him. And there was no time to lose. She grabbed hold of the cat's fur and pulled herself up onto his head.

Domino was still staring at the place in the water where Dick had fallen in. He didn't seem sure just what had happened.

Emily stood on her toes on the cat's head. She leaned over and dived into the tank.



20

Emily tried to dive between the plants in the fish tank. But she wasn't a very good diver, and she belly-flopped right into the middle of a tangle of floating grass. One long strand twined around the leg of her jeans. Emily tried to tear it off, but it was tough and wiry. She had to stop and tread water while she unwound the slippery grass. It seemed an age before she was free. She had to find Dick!

Emily took a deep breath and swam down into the tank. But she kept bobbing to the top of the water. She grabbed a plant stem and pulled herself down. It was like climbing a tree upside down.

The tank seemed much bigger now that Emily was in it. When she reached the bottom she still had to hold on to the plant to keep from bobbing up again.

Suddenly someone grabbed Emily's shoulders and hung on. She was so startled that she let go of the plant stem. At once she floated to the top of the water.

Emily turned her head to see who was clinging to her.

It was Dick. "You float like a cork, Em. I'm sure glad you came along. I couldn't have held my breath much longer."

"It's funny," Emily said. "You can't float, and I can't sink."

Dick grinned. "Together we ought to be able to work out something. I saw some things I'd like to get a better look at. Hold on to me, Em. Maybe I can pull you down."

Now it was Emily's turn to hang on to Dick's shoulders. He kicked his feet hard and swam to the bottom of the tank.

Two fat goldfish with flowing tails swam in front of the children. Dick pointed to a pile of dark red rocks, but Emily whirled him around and started floating up. Dick hung on to her, and she towed

him to the top of the water. They poked their faces out and gulped for air.

“That was a *castle*, Em,” Dick said. “I want to explore it.”

“So do I,” Emily told him. “But I had to get my breath back. I’m ready now.”

“Come on, then.” Dick slipped down through the water, pulling Emily along behind him.

When they came to the castle, Dick looked inside it. A school of tiny guppies rushed out. They swarmed all over Dick and Emily, nipping at their ears and noses.

Dick started to slap at the little fish.

Emily grabbed his hands and pulled him to the top of the water.

Dick stuck his head out into the air. “Those things really bite!”

“Maybe they’re hungry,” Emily said.

“If it’s feeding time,” Dick told her, “Mr. Dooley will be coming to dump dried flies and ants’ eggs in the tank.”

Emily had forgotten all about Mr. Dooley. “We’d better get out of here.” She looked up at the smooth straight sides of the tank. “But how are we going to do it?”

“I’m out already,” she heard Dick say.

The next moment something hooked onto Emily’s shirt. She tried to slip out of the shirt, but she was caught fast. Emily felt herself lifted high into the air.

21

Emily looked up into two huge blinking eyes. “Domino!”

The cat put her down on the table beside the fish tank. Emily tried to get up, but her shirt was still caught on one of Domino’s claws. He held his paw very still while Emily unhooked her shirt from the sharp point. When she was free, Emily got to her feet.

Dick was lying on the table near her. He was still trying to get loose from Domino’s other front paw. Emily went to help him.

When Dick was off the hook, he took a good look at the cat’s claw. “Suppose he missed and stuck it into *me*! Let’s go home and change back to our right size, Em.”

“How are we going to get upstairs?” Emily asked. “We can’t slide *up*.”

“Maybe Domino can give us some more help,” Dick said. “He’s done pretty well so far.”

“We never even thanked him for getting us out of the fish tank.” Emily reached up to stroke Domino under the chin. Then she climbed onto his back and sat down.

Dick took his place astride the cat’s neck. “Take us back to our own house, Domino,” he said.

Domino jumped softly off the table. He ran across the living room to the hall and started up the stairs.

Emily held tight to the cat’s fur and bounced up and down. “Mr. Dooley must be upstairs,” she said. “Watch out, Domino.”

The cat went silently up the stairs and down the dusty hall to the big bathroom. He squeezed through the crack in the wall behind the old bathtub. There was hardly enough room for the cat. Emily and Dick crouched low on his back.

“I’d forgotten how dark and creepy it is in here,” Dick said. “I hope one of those giant cockroaches doesn’t fall on us.”

Emily pulled her little red flashlight out of her pocket. She wasn’t sure it would work after being in the fish tank. She turned it on. It lit up the dark tunnel. “Is this better?”

Dick grinned. “Much. *Seeing* a roach isn’t nearly as scary as *feeling* it.”

Domino picked his way through the crooked passage. He stepped around wooden slats and climbed over chunks of old plaster. When he came to the wet cement, the cat stopped and shook each paw in turn. Then he went on again.

Emily and Dick saw a glimmer of light. A moment later Domino stepped out of the hole Pete had made. He lay down on the floor of the shower stall.

“We’re home!” Emily climbed off the cat’s back. She clicked off the flashlight and put it back into her pocket. “I’m soaking wet, but it doesn’t seem to have hurt the flashlight.”

“I’m wet, too.” Dick slid to the ground. “What a good cat you are, Domino! I know you hate water.”

Domino turned his head and licked the damp place on his back. Then he leaped over the sill of the shower and trotted out of the pink bathroom.

“I hate to think of him having to stay outdoors in all kinds of weather and having to catch birds and squirrels for food,” Emily said. “I wish we could find a good home for him.”

22

The magic pencil was lying on the floor of the shower. Dick ran over to it. “It’s as big as a log, Em. I can’t even lift it.”

Emily looked at the pencil. How could she have been so stupid? Even if she could have lifted the pencil, the blunt point was too thick to write on anything as small as Dick’s arm, or her own.

“What’ll we do now, Em?” Dick asked. “We can’t reach the doorknob to let Pete into the house when he comes back. Dad’s going to have a fit when he sees this shower. And I’ll bet Mom won’t like us being this size at all. We won’t be able to load the dishwasher for her.”

Emily didn’t answer. She was climbing over the high sill of the shower door. Dick gave her a boost. Then she turned around and helped him over. They ran down the hall to the top of the stairs and slid down the slanting baseboard to the floor below.

The stepladder was standing where Emily had put it on the drop cloth in the living room when they came home from their picnic.

“You should have left it on its side,” Dick told her. “This way we need a rope.” He ran to the kitchen and looked up at the drawer in the cabinet. “Mom keeps string in there.”

The drawer was open just wide enough for Dick to wiggle down into it—if only he could get up there.

Emily pried open the cupboard at the bottom of the cabinet. “Give me a hand, Dick.”

Together they pulled out a saucepan and turned it over. Dick climbed on the pan and from there stepped onto the handle of the cupboard. He swung himself to the top of the cupboard door. Now he could step onto the ledge of the cabinet.

Dick walked across the ledge and let himself down into the drawer. “It’s dark in here. I wish I had your flashlight.”

Emily heard him rustling around like a mouse. Then she saw his hand gripping the top edge of the drawer. A moment later, Dick came crawling out. He had a coil of string looped over his arm. “Here, catch!”

Dick threw the string to Emily. Then he dropped from the ledge to the top of the cupboard door and on down to the floor.

The string seemed like a heavy rope. Together they carried it to the living room. Emily got down on all fours at the foot of the ladder. “Stand on my back.”

Dick pulled himself onto the lowest step. “Hand me the rope.” He tied it around the step and Emily shinnied up to join him.

Step by step they climbed the ladder. When Dick reached the first red step, he said, “My head feels awful. It never felt this bad before.” He tossed one end of the rope over the step. Emily had to tie it by herself. Dick closed his eyes and held tight to the step. “Hurry, Em!”

It’s because we’re so small, Emily thought. The magic is too strong for us. And Dick is smaller than I am.

Emily climbed the rope onto the red step. “We want to go where Pete is,” she said.

Dick’s face was very white. He looked sick.

“Grab the rope,” Emily said.

Dick leaned against her. “I can’t, Em. My head hurts too much.”

Emily’s head felt worse than it ever had in all her life. She grabbed the rope with one hand and held on to Dick with the other. The ladder seemed much taller than a house. The rope cut into Emily’s hand.

She dragged Dick off the red step and tried to hang on to the rope. But she lost her grip on it.

Emily held tight to her brother and closed her eyes. The two children tumbled off the ladder.

23

It seemed to Emily as if they had been falling for ages. She wondered if they'd ever hit the ground.

And then, thump! Emily and Dick landed on something warm and not nearly as hard as what Emily had been expecting.

She opened her eyes and saw what seemed to be an enormous, dirty thumb.

It took the two children a few moments before they realized what had happened.

They had been caught by two huge hands!

Dick looked up. "Pete!"

Emily peeked between the big fingers. The plumber was standing next to the ladder on the front stoop of Emily and Dick's house.

Pete stared down at them. "You must have been fooling with my pencil. I wondered what happened to it."

"You left it on the kitchen table," Emily said.

Pete grinned. "How were the graham crackers?"

"They were great. Thank you," Emily told him.

"Your pencil is in our bathroom now, Pete," Dick said. "We didn't hurt it."

"But you almost killed yourselves falling off my ladder," Pete said. "You ought to be more careful." He looked up and down the street. "Let's go inside before your neighbors see you like this. Do you have a key?"

Emily tugged at a string around her neck. She pulled the house key from under her shirt.

Pete looked at it. "That key's too small to open this door now. We're in trouble, kids."

"We could use the ladder," Emily said. "There's nobody around to see us."

"It's a handy ladder. But I never want people to see me fold it. Anyway I can't see how it would get the door open. Of course, if I had

my pencil I could just write *unlocked* on the door." Pete grinned. "I've found there's a lot you can do with that pencil if you put your mind to it."

"Where'd you get the pencil?" Dick asked.

"Same place I got the ladder," Pete told him. "A friend gave them to me. But she never said there was anything special about them. I had to find that out for myself."

"The way we did," Dick said.

Pete nodded.

"Did you ever stand on the red steps of the ladder?" Emily asked him.

"Of course not! Red means *Danger*!" The plumber frowned. "You must have been standing on those steps when you fell."

"If you stand on the red steps, Pete," Emily said, "you can go anywhere you say you want to go."

"And we all want to go into the house," Dick said.

Pete put Emily into one of his pants pockets and Dick into the other. Then he climbed the ladder to the first red step. "My head feels funny," he said. "And my ears are buzzing."

Emily's head felt as if it would crack in half. She was sure Dick's felt worse. "We want to be back in our own house," she said.

"Nothing's happened." Pete backed off the red step.

Emily's head felt better at once.

Pete backed all the way down the ladder and stepped off at the bottom. He looked around.

They were on the drop cloth in the living room right under the hole in the ceiling.

24

Emily started to climb out of Pete's pocket.

"Take it easy, kids." Pete pulled the children out of his pockets. "We'd better do something about your size before you get into any more trouble." He carried Emily and Dick upstairs to the pink bathroom. "Where's the pencil?"

"In the shower," Dick said.

Pete held the children in one hand and picked up the pencil with the other. He looked hard at it. "Do you have a pencil sharpener?"

"There's one in the kitchen," Emily told him.

Pete took the children downstairs and put them on the kitchen table.

Dick looked at the box of graham crackers. "We took these along on our picnic. That's when we found out about the magic pencil."

"Picnic? Is that where you two were when I rang your doorbell?" Pete walked over to the pencil sharpener that was screwed to the cabinet.

"We borrowed your ladder," Emily told him. "I hope you don't mind."

Pete carefully sharpened the yellow pencil stub. "I spent the time looking for Mr. Checkers." The plumber came back to the table. "Now, where are the pencil marks on you?"

Dick and Emily showed him the numbers written on their arms.

"They're so small I can't read them." Pete gently rubbed the children's arms with the eraser on the end of the pencil. As soon as the rubber touched their skin, the numbers vanished.

“You first, Emily,” Pete said. “Lie on your stomach and pull your shirt up off your back.”

Emily did as she was told, and the plumber wrote on her bare back with the sharp point of his pencil. “It tickles,” she said, trying not to giggle.

The next thing Emily knew her feet were sticking over the edge of the table. She wiggled off and dropped to the floor. “Pete!” she said. “How did you do it? I’m just as big as I was before. Exactly!”

The plumber smiled. “Watch!”

Now Dick lay on his stomach and Pete wrote with very small letters on his back:

RIGHT

SIZE

25

Emily looked at the kitchen clock. “It’s almost five o’clock! Mother and Daddy will be home soon. Can you fix the wall of Daddy’s shower, Pete?”

“I never got the bricks I need,” Pete said. “The man didn’t even have enough to finish the porch he was building. Nice guy. Turned out he knew my uncle Harry.”

Emily wasn’t listening. She ran down the steps to the basement and came back with the paper bag of charcoal bricks. “I didn’t believe you when you said you could use these.”

Pete took the bag. “I’d forgotten all about them.”

“Hurry, Pete,” Emily said. “Dick and I will wait down here while you work.”

Pete took the bag of charcoal and went upstairs.

Dick started after him. “I want to see what he does.”

Emily grabbed his arm. “You stay here. Pete will start talking and never get the job done.”

In almost no time they heard the plumber calling down the stairs. “Do you want to take a look?”

Dick and Emily raced upstairs to the pink bathroom. Pete handed Emily the bag of charcoal. She saw that he had written FULL on it.

They peeked into the stall shower. The ugly hole in the wall was gone. And all the shiny tiles were back in place.

Pete had gone downstairs. The children found him on his ladder in the living room. He was standing on the third step from the top.

The ceiling was white and smooth. There was no sign of the hole Pete had made in it. And the big damp place was gone.

Pete backed down the ladder and stepped off onto the drop cloth. Then he folded the ladder and put it into his shirt pocket. He looked at the big hammer lying on the drop cloth. “I’d better not forget this.”

Pete took the yellow pencil stub from behind his ear and erased *28″*. Instead he wrote *1″*. He dropped it into his pocket with the ladder.

He wrote with his pencil on the corner of the drop cloth. At once it was no bigger than a handkerchief. Pete stuffed it into the back pocket of his pants. “I’ll shake the plaster off it when I get outside,” he said. “I have to go now.”

“Thank you for helping us,” Emily said. “Are we going to see you again, Pete?”

The plumber smiled. “Of course. Tomorrow I’m doing a job for your neighbor.” Pete walked into the front hall.

“Not mean old Mr. Dooley?” Dick said.

“He’s not mean at all. I was talking to him while I was waiting for you to open your front door. He’s just not used to kids.” Pete laughed. “And he’s scared to death of you two! I told him he’ll like you when he gets to know you.”

“What kind of job are you doing for Mr. Dooley?” Dick asked.

“He has trouble with his water pipes,” Pete said. “The poor guy can’t even wash his floors.”

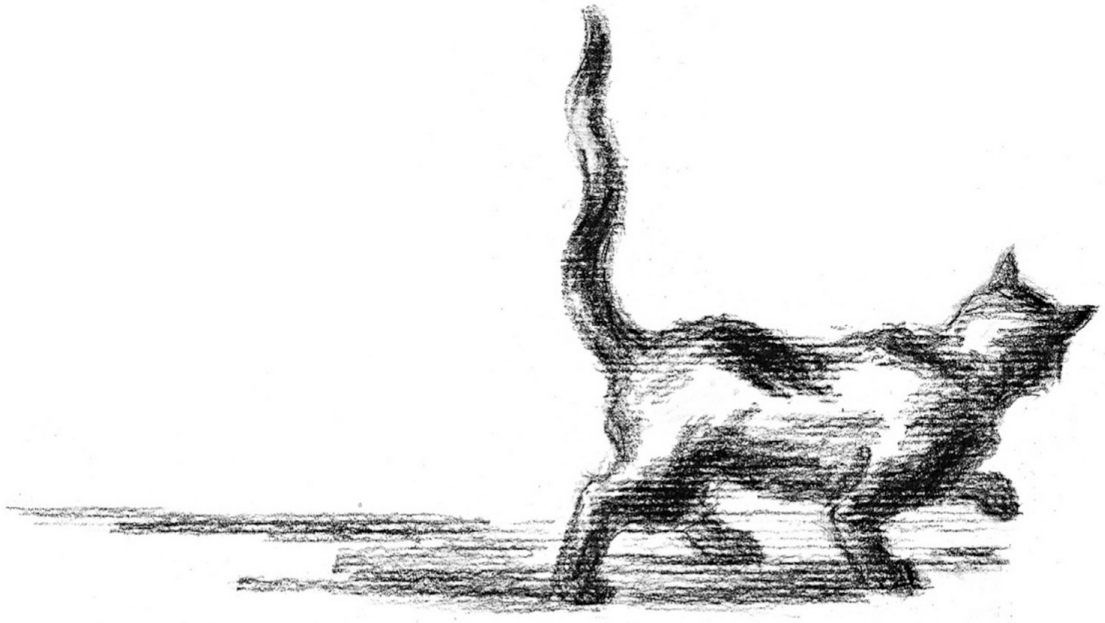
“Meow!” Domino came walking down the stairs.

“Mr. Checkers!” Pete cried. “Where have you been? I’ve been looking all over for you.”

“Is *he* Mr. Checkers?” Emily asked. “We call him Domino.”

Pete leaned over to pet the cat. “Maybe he likes that name better. How about it, Domino? Shall we go home now?”

Domino purred and bumped his head against Pete’s leg. Pete opened the front door and went out. The black and white cat followed him down the street.



About the Author

Ruth Chew was born in Minneapolis and studied at the Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington, DC.

Working as a fashion artist, she started writing stories about witches for the youngest of her five children. The first of these, *The Wednesday Witch*, was a big hit, and her new career was born. Ruth Chew went on to write twenty-nine tales of magic and fantasy that have enchanted generations of readers.

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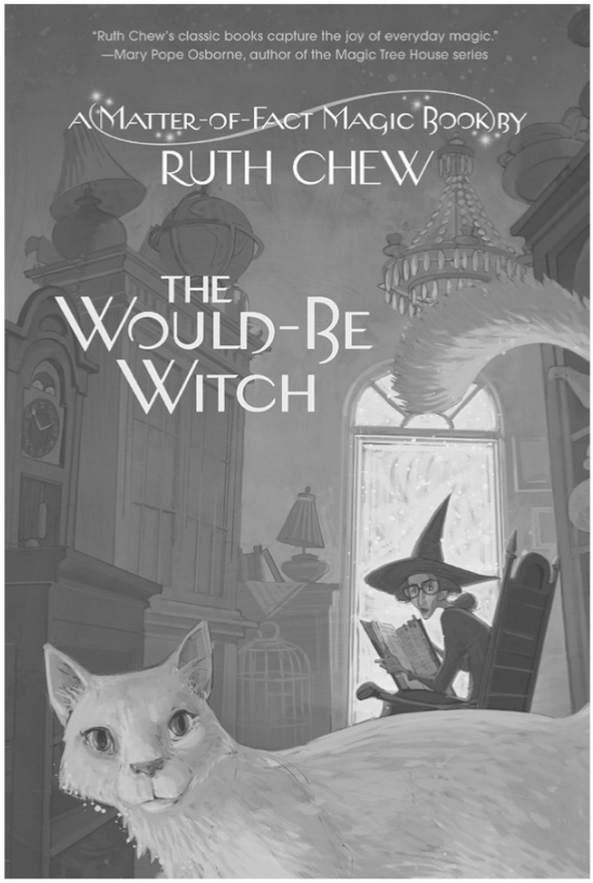
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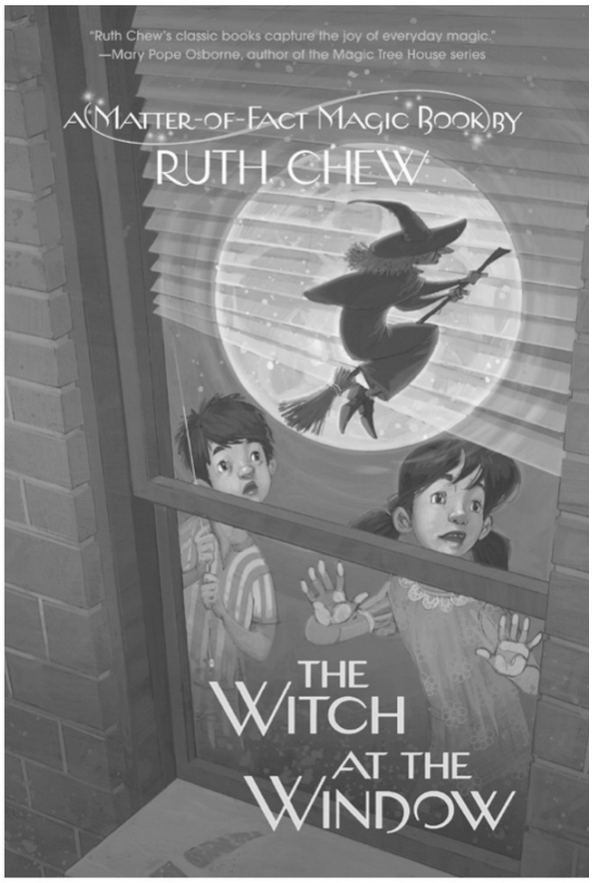
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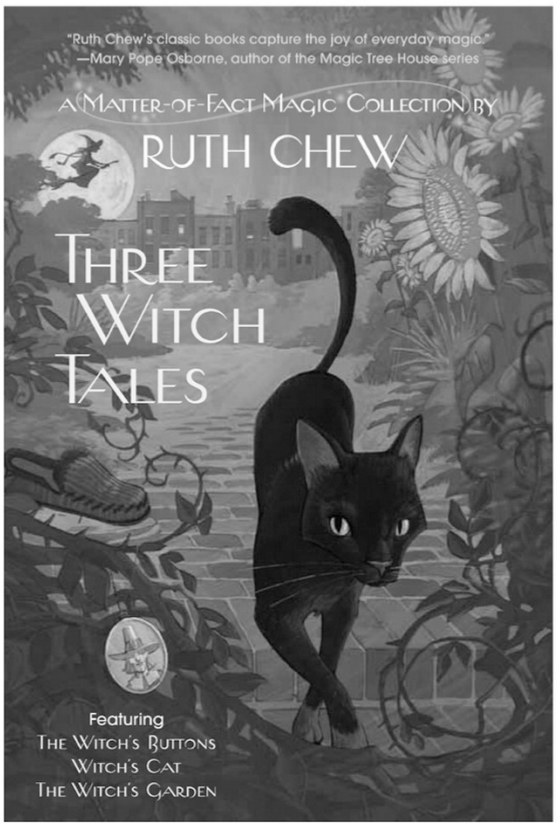
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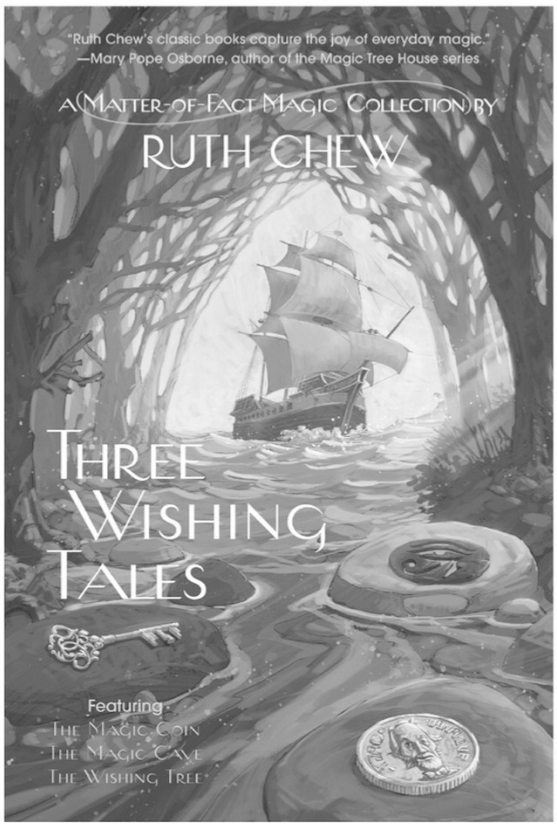
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